Didi Hamann + A-Z of Anfield + Ultimate LFC book quiz + 1965 FA Cup kings + Reds on Instagram + Neil Mellor

LIVERPOOL FC

official liverpool fc monthly magazine

STEVEN GERRARD
"THE BEST I'VE EVER SCORED"

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

EMRE CAN
LET'S GO TO WORK

PHIL GOOD FACTOR
COUTINHO'S FLICKS & TRICKS

ATTACK! ATTACK!
ONE-ON-ONE WITH MARKOVIC

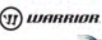
PLUS

Jordon Ibe on his return to Anfield

King Kenny: one from the archives

Liverpool Ladies: a fan's preview

ISSUE 031 £3.95





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WARRIOR
Garuda Indonesia
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WARRIOR



COLD SNAP

Some of Liverpool FC's Latin contigent take time-out from training at Melwood on a typically brisk winter's morning for a quick photo-opportunity. Left to right: Lucas, Jose Enrique, Alberto Moreno, Javier Manquillo and Philippe Coutinho. Okay now – who's hidden Javi's trackie bottoms?


adidas
crown pai



LEGEND

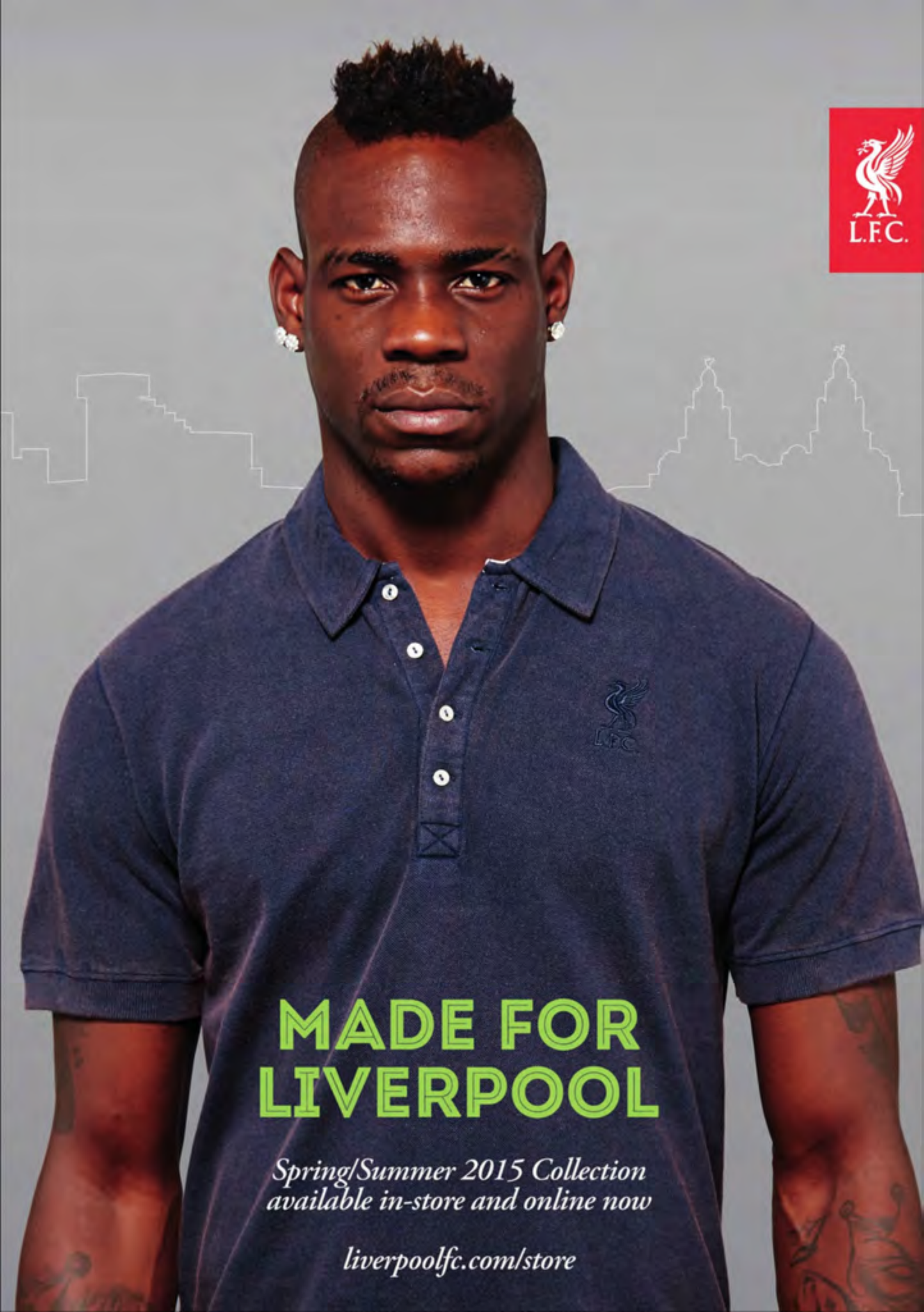
Any excuse for a classic – and quite rare – shot of the King from the LFC archives. This photograph was taken in the players tunnel at Stamford Bridge seconds after his winner against Chelsea had clinched the 1986 League title. Kenny Dalglish, striker supreme, turns 64 next month.



JUST FAB

It's dejection for goalkeeper Brad Guzan and his Aston Villa defence after Fabio Borini gives Liverpool the lead on 24 minutes with a striker's finish at Villa Park.Team-mate Rickie Lambert secured the win and three points for the travelling Reds with an equally well-taken effort 11 minutes from time.





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FLY PAST

Cast in silhouette by the pale January sunshine, a flock of Canada geese fly over Anfield's Main Stand during the FA Cup fourth-round tie with Bolton Wanderers. It's certainly an adventurous formation from an outfit with several options on the wing.

1 CAPTAIN'S CALL

In an emotional first interview since news broke of his decision to leave the club at the end of the season, Steven Gerrard has spoken to LFCTV, insisting that this summer "will be the right time to move on and try something different – come out of the club and the city for a short while, and hopefully have the opportunity to return."

He insisted: "I'll only come back and serve the club if I feel as if I can help. I'll always be a fan, of course, no matter what happens in the future.… When you've been part of a club like this for so long and you've contributed in the way I've tried to, I'd always want that to stay the same in the future. [But] if I sit down with the people who are running the club at that time and they see a role for me where I can help the team or help young kids to become players, of course I will consider it because it's been such a big part of my life."

Steven concluded: "The last couple of weeks [of the season] will probably be how the last 24 hours have been – very tough. I'm really proud of what I've done and hopefully I can write a few more chapters with the team from now to the end. But the last game and training sessions are going to be torture because it's so tough to say goodbye. But hopefully it's more of a see-you-soon rather than a goodbye."

The full interview has been free to view in full on LFCTV GO in a special Episode 22 of #LFCWORLD.

"It'll be tough but hopefully a see-you-soon rather than goodbye"



2 NEW GIRLS

Two Scandinavian stars, an American ace and the African player of the year have bolstered the Liverpool Ladies squad. Central defender Satara Murray, 21, joins the double WSL champions from US college team North Carolina Tar Heels. Full-back Ingrid Ryland, 25, arrives from Norwegian club Arna-Bjornar, while compatriot Line Krogedal Smorsgard is a 27-year-old striker formerly with Klepp IL. And Asisat Oshoala is an explosive striker from Nigerian champions River Falls.

Manager Matt Beard says: "Satara is a massive talent, Ingrid will help to improve our defence, and Line is an excellent striker with a keen eye for goal – she'll help us improve going forward. And signing Asisat is an incredible coup for the club."

3 POINTS CLEAR

The skipper makes his toughest decision; the Ladies make new signings; and the Memorial makes a temporary move



3 MEMORIAL MOVE

The Hillsborough Memorial has been placed in safe storage as construction work gets underway on the expansion of the Main Stand.

The club hosted a service for the families at Anfield and a temporary memorial was unveiled at the entrance of the Centenary Stand where visitors can continue to pay their respects.

The Eternal Flame has been transferred to the city's Anglican Cathedral where it will reside for the time being. When the Main Stand expansion is completed during the 2016/17 season, the Memorial will then move to its new location in a specially-designed colonnade accessible from the Main Stand.


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EMRE CAN HAS THE ABILITY & THE ENGINE BUT HE KNOWS THESE GIFTS MEAN NOTHING WITHOUT HARD WORK

Monday 7 July 2014. After the relative calm of the summer break, Melwood is once again alive with the unmistakable noise of footballers as the first team return for pre-season training. About 20 minutes in to a practice-match the regular shouts of 'Man on!' and 'Switch it!' are interrupted by the sound of applause.

Such clapping is usually reserved for special moments of brilliance, and the overhead kick Emre Can has just scored is certainly one of those. The eye-catching goal hinted at the ability that persuaded Brendan Rodgers to sign him from Bayer Leverkusen, and explained why former Reds midfielder Didi Hamann greeted his arrival by saying: "There is no doubt Can is talented. I think he's exactly the type of player Liverpool should be going for. He's only 20 and has a lot of potential."

Unlocking that potential was going to take some time as he was new to the Premier League and would naturally need a period of acclimatisation. While appearing for 29 second-half minutes at Spurs in late August he showed enough to suggest he could play an important role in the side. Then, an ankle injury suffered while on U21 duty with Germany left him on crutches and on the sidelines for six weeks. It meant it wasn't until the festive period that he was again a regular on the team-sheet and illustrated what he could do.

Can, who turned 21 the day before this interview, looks older and definitely has a maturity about the way he speaks. "Being injured is part and parcel of football," he reasons. "It's frustrating but you have to get on with it. I settled in really well here, my team-mates made it easier for me. The only problem was being unable to play."

Mention of the overhead kick on his first day at Melwood makes him smile: "I've not done that too often in my life. So to do it in my first training session was good timing. In terms of if it made settling in easier, I'm not so sure. I think it would have been the same for me with or without that goal."

As well as his ability, Can's versatility is one of the reasons cited by Rodgers for his acquisition. That was demonstrated perfectly in Liverpool's 1-0 win at Sunderland in January. After starting in a three-man defence he then moved into an advanced midfield position before finishing the game out wide. His ability to play almost everywhere and anywhere, even inside one 90-minute period, goes back to his childhood in Frankfurt where he grew up with his parents and older sister.

"Back in Germany we have a saying that work beats talent"

"My mum is a housewife and my dad worked in Frankfurt Airport. He still works there now and I can't imagine him ever giving up the job. He's not the type of person who will sit around all day; he prefers to be active. Nobody in our house was into football. I don't know why I took to it. From about the age of six I used to spend all day outside kicking around a ball with my friends. As we were kids we didn't have positions, it was just about playing anywhere. When I was 10 I even played in goal. Let's just say I'm better outfield.

"I tried playing table-tennis and pool too, but football was the be-all and end-all. I dreamed and hoped I would become a professional one day."

That same aspiration is something millions of kids around the world entertain while growing up. Only a lucky few ever make it. Can was one of those, but despite possessing the talent that persuaded Eintracht Frankfurt to sign him, he never assumed anything. "In Germany we have a saying that work beats talent. The way I look at it is without talent you are nowhere, but without work you are nowhere too. So you need a combination of the two. If you don't work, you won't get anywhere, no matter how good you are. There are a lot of talented youngsters who don't make it. That's why I always worked hard when I was trying to become a footballer and still do now. I never thought or believed I would certainly make it until I had the pen in my hand to sign my first contract."

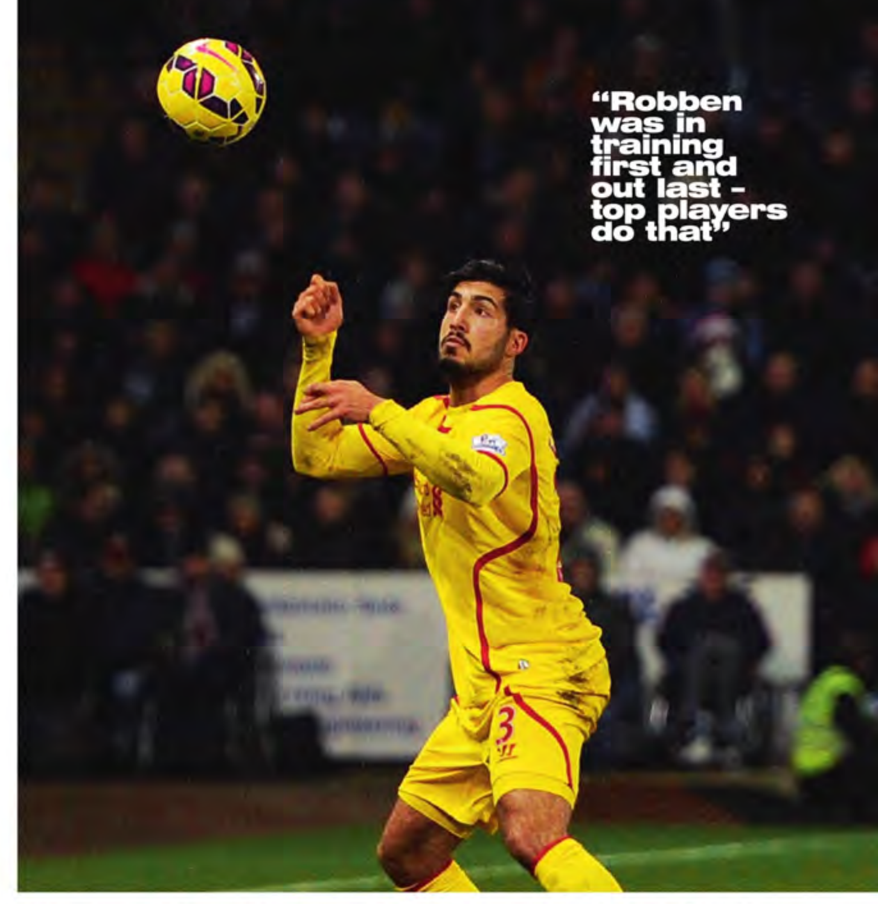
Emre's progress during his formative years with Eintracht saw him catch the eye of Germany's biggest club, Bayern Munich. So impressed were the Bavarians that they signed him at the age of 15. Along with his talent, his size also made him stand out. Tall and broad-shouldered, he's not sure where he his natural physical attributes come from. "I'm like the opposite of everyone in my family! They are all small whereas I am obviously not."

While moving to Bayern as a teenager sounds perfect, the transition – 300km from home – wasn't without some initial difficulties. "I stayed in their academy. It's like a combination of a hostel and a boarding school. The first two or three months were all new and exciting. It was brilliant to be at Bayern



Words: [illegible]


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23



"Robben was in training first and out last - top players do that"

Munich and I was so eager to learn. Then I started to miss my family. I was quite lonely at that point and would phone home every day. It was difficult but I told myself: keep going. I knew that I could get through it."

That determination paid off as he progressed through the Munich ranks and made his debut for the senior side in the 2012 Supercup [Germany's Community Shield]. Bayern's star was firmly in the ascendancy: they'd reach two Champions League finals in a row. Such success and the depth of talent available in the squad made it difficult for the teenager to break through. However, while waiting for the rare chances that did come his way, Can observed the habits of the players like Philippe Lahm, Bastian Schweinsteiger, Franck Ribery, Manuel Neur and Arjen Robben. "First of all I noticed they are good people away from the pitch. When it comes to dedication Robben is an example I always remember. Before training he'd be in early to do some work by himself. He would be out on the field doing sprints while others were arriving or getting ready. After training it was the same – he'd stay behind doing more when everyone else was going home. And this was when he was 26 or 27, not a youngster but an experienced player who had already won a lot.

"All the top players have that attitude and commitment. They've achieved but want to do more, get better. Cristiano Ronaldo is another. I've obviously not played with him, but when he won the Ballon d'Or he was on Instagram the next day talking about working to get even better. It's crazy but that's the attitude you need."

Can yearned for regular first-team football. Hence his switch to Sami Hyypia's Bayer Leverkusen in the summer of 2013. His one season there provided him with a steep learning curve as he tasted Champions League action, helped the team to finish third and filled a number of positions. "Left-back, left-midfield or in central midfield, I played in all of those roles at Bayer and I've played in a few different positions here at Liverpool too. I think the coach knows my preferred position is central midfield, but I'm still young so I'm happy to play wherever needed. I am always willing to help the team."


Training with Gerrard and Henderson

Although expressing a preference for the centre of the park, he believes the role of a midfielder is more difficult. "You're under more pressure there because there is no time. If I am playing in defence I can get a rest when the ball is at the other end. You don't have that opportunity if you are in midfield, especially here in England.

"Before I came to the Premier League people told me it was the fastest in the world. I thought: yeah, it might be. Now I know it is. The high tempo and box-to-box play is very different [to Germany]. I think football in this country is unique and definitely more physical. I am a physical player, but you have to tackle properly. There is no point recklessly giving away fouls. When I was younger my coach said I got angry every time I was fouled or committed a foul. I don't think that is the case now. I've learned. You have to fight to get the ball in the first place, try to be eager and aggressive in the right way. Then if you do get possession you need to think properly."

Can can certainly do that. Alongside his physicality is the ability to see a pass and then execute it with precision – demonstrated perfectly with a superb through-ball for Fabio Borini in the win at Sunderland. As some observers were quick to point out, it was the type of pass that Steven Gerrard produces.

The captain has already had a big influence on the no23. "He's shown what he can do over many years," Emre says. "Before the Chelsea [league] game he told me it was my turn to shine. When somebody like Steven tells you that it feels great. It gives you real belief and motivation to go out and show what you can do."

Can promptly registered his first goal for the club just nine minutes in to that contest. "Scoring goals is always a great thing. At those moments you realise how fantastic football is and how much I enjoy it. I love being on the pitch, seeing and hearing the crowd.

"The thought of being in the Premier League playing for Liverpool at the age of 21 never entered my mind a few years ago. It wasn't something that I'd ever thought about. I was just concentrating on doing well in the Bundesliga. But now I'm here I want to make sure I have success."

"I prefer to play in central midfield even though there's no time there"

What they say on Emre

"One of the biggest talents in German football."
Karl-Heinz Rummenigge

"He likes to get on the ball and control the game, and he has got so much ability – but he's a young player at 20 years of age and we have not seen the best of him yet."
Brendan Rodgers

"A top player with a lot of talent – we're seeing that now and I'm sure he will keep getting better."
Kolo Toure

"One of those players that always gives 100 per cent on the pitch – he'll have a great career at Liverpool."
Sami Hyypia

"A strong player, a good tackler, and a great engine – he can play a few positions as well, so he's going to be a great player for Liverpool."
Adam Lallana

MIGHTY

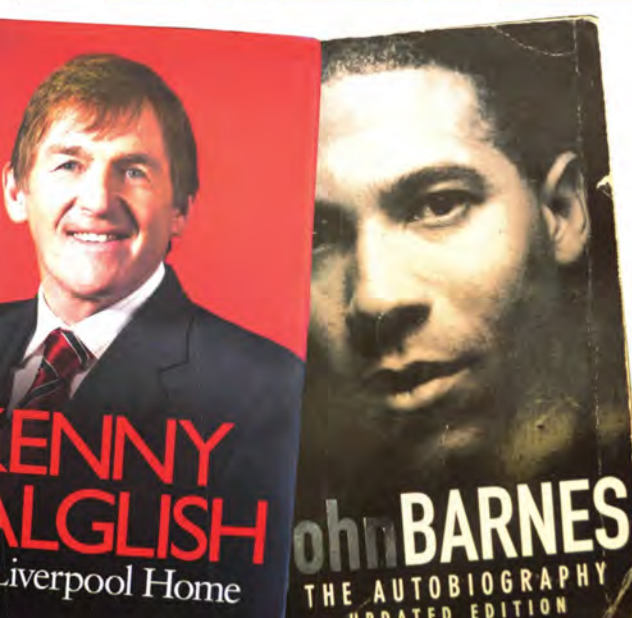
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Four Years with Real Madrid
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STEVE McMANAMA
is a good witness, [and]
SARAH EDWORTHY
weaves it all together quite brilliantly'

READS



Think you know your LFC autobiographies? Then try these 20 literary questions for size…

1 In 2003 local broadcaster John Keith authored a biography entitled *The Legend Who Carried The Kop* – about whom?

2 Who used their autobiography to reveal the following: "When Liverpool won the Champions League in Istanbul on May 25, 2005 there was one player missing from the celebrations – me. Not many people know this, but the £6 million deal that took me to Anfield was already done by then. It was not announced until July, but on the night that Liverpool won their fifth European Cup in the most incredible fashion imaginable I belonged to them."

3 What was the title of Craig Johnston's autobiography, originally published in 1989?

4 Whose autobiography has chapters entitled *That Goal*, *The Team Of All The Talents*, and *Italia 90: A Summer With Gazza*?

5 In which year was Steven Gerrard's official autobiography first published?

6 In Bob Paisley's authorised biography, recently updated to mark the 40th anniversary of his appointment as Reds boss, he says: "I just hoped that after the trials and tribulations of my early years in management, someone up high would smile on me and guide my hand. My plea was answered when we got" – whom?

7 Whose 2000 autobiography was entitled *From Anfield to Vetch Field*?

8 Who's this writing about his halcyon days at Anfield… "I had been so happy at Liverpool: everything about the football club was great, and I am proud to have been associated with them. No one was ever bigger than the club, whether it was a top player, Peter Robinson or John Smith, the chairman. I've lost touch now, mainly because I don't make it a habit to go back. I would rather remember it the way it was in my era. I've got my own personal memories, and that's all I need."

9 Which comedian wrote the foreword for Dietmar Hamann's autobiography, *The Didi Man: My Love Affair With Liverpool*?

10 Dr Andrew J Lees was the co-author of which former LFC midfielder's autobiography?

11 Last Christmas, when asked to sign the inside of his autobiography by a young Liverpool fan, what did former Manchester United star Roy Keane put?

12 What was the Scorsese-sounding title of Craig Bellamy's recent no-holds-barred autobiography?

13 Which 1970s ace said of his autobiography, published last year: "Mine isn't a game-by-game account of my career. It's more about feelings and tales. There's a lot of stuff in there that people don't know about."

14 Which future legend first experienced the LFC dressing-room aged 15 and later wrote: "Seeing Willie Stevenson, I walked across the dressing-room, clutching a piece of paper and a pen. 'Will you sign this please, Willie?' 'No.' His answer was short and brutal, stunning me. My hero had refused. Just as I turned away, my heart broken, Willie said, 'Oh, all right!' Then Hunt, Cally, the Saint and all the players laughed. Their behavior gave me a glimpse of the Liverpool way. This teasing was how the dressing-room worked and how they made people feel at ease. As Willie signed, I felt that this could be my home."

15 Which word is missing from the title of Roy Evans' authorised biography: ****** On The Wall*?

16 'A sizeable cut above the average footballer's tale… [it] makes intelligent use of a range of sources in what is the first insider's account of the Florentino Perez era at Real'. Whose 2004 autobiography was *World Soccer* magazine praising?

17 Whose book features a photograph of him alongside compatriot Sean Connery as the pair celebrate a pro-celebrity golf victory over Lee Trevino and Sandy Lyle?

18 What is the title of the recent Luis Suarez autobiography?

19 Who used their book to voice this opinion: "English football as a whole needs to rethink how quickly players are judged, how to ensure those with the potential to step up get the opportunity to do so. The history of our game is littered with examples of world class-class performers who peaked in their late twenties. Look at John Aldridge, or Ian Wright. How many lower-league players get plucked from obscurity these days?"

20 Which two managers both wrote forewords for Gary Ablett's book, *The Game of My Life*?

ANSWERS **1.** Billy Liddell; **2.** Pepe Reina; **3.** *Walk Alone*; **4.** John Barnes; **5.** 2007; **6.** Kenny Dalglish from Celtic; **7.** Jan Molby; **8.** Kevin Keegan; **9.** John Bishop; **10.** Ray Kennedy – neurologist Dr Lees became his close friend; **11.** Keane wrote: "You'll Never Walk Alone"; **12.** *GoodFellas*; **13.** Jimmy Case; **14.** Kenny Dalglish; **15.** *Ghost*; **16.** Steve McManaman's *El Macca*; **17.** Ian St John's *The Saint*; **18.** *Crossing The Line*; **19.** Jamie Carragher; **20.** Kenny Dalglish and David Moyes.

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Goal v QPR

The clock said 89 minutes and 44 seconds when the Reds broke from deep in their own half to score what appeared to be the winner at Loftus Road in mid-October. First Raheem Sterling span away from close attention to find Steven Gerrard who in turn fed Coutinho, who dribbled into the edge of the area and fired hard and low into the net. Just two more even later goals to come then! Incidentally it meant Coutinho had scored in both of his Premier League appearances against Rangers.











Gunning for Arsenal

December at Anfield against Arsenal. With 45 minutes on the clock time and space were at a premium when Coutinho trapped the ball just inside the D outside the Gunners penalty area, three defenders between him and a clear sight of goal. Jinking to his right, he wrong-footed Mathieu Debuchy and Per Mertesacker and left Wojciech Szczesny rooted to the spot with a shot which went in off the post. Just reward for the midfielder whose verve and dash kept Liverpool on the front foot and Arsenal on their heels for long periods.





PCWO



Owning Cesc

What an assist this would have been. Eighteen minutes into last November's Premier League game against Chelsea at Anfield, he received the ball in the visitors' half then juggled it a couple of times before dinking it up and over Cesc Fabregas. He shrugged off the challenge of Ramires and slid the ball through to Mario Balotelli, who was just offside as he swept the ball past Chelsea keeper Courtois into the net. The footage even made the *Metro* website later that day.

Burnley assist

A hard-fought win over Premier League new boys Burnley at Turf Moor on Boxing Day was earned courtesy of Raheem Sterling's second-half goal from Coutinho's magical flick over the home defence with the outside of his right boot. Sterling rounded Burnley keeper Tom Heaton to slot home the winner. In what was a tough away match in the middle of a hectic fixture schedule, it was just one in a series of star performances from Coutinho which earned him the club's player of the month award for December 2014. Well deserved!























Slicing through Swansea

Six shots from the brilliant Brazilian, no goals to his name, but a man-of-the-match performance in the Premier League fixture with Swansea City at Anfield at the end of last year. It included a back-heeled assist for Adam Lallana's second goal of the game – and this earlier virtuoso moment when Coutinho dribbled from the edge of the penalty box to the touchline, dummying Swans skipper Ashley Williams with a neat drag-back before unleashing a fierce shot which was saved by goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski. Team-mate Lallana called him "magnificent – some of the balls he played and his vision is unbelievable. It's a real pleasure to be playing with such a good player."



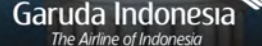
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A to Z of Anfield

PART 5

Another instalment of our encyclopaedic series about Liverpool Football Club's hallowed home, covering everything from the King Harry to Queen Liz...


768





is for **STATUE** – the bronze one of the great Bill Shankly, arms aloft and scarf round neck, cast in bronze and unveiled outside the Spion Kop in 1997, 15 years after the Shankly Gates were erected. A place to meet before the match, and of course to have your photograph taken.

And for **SCULPTURE** – there's one in low relief of Bob Paisley, who of course succeeded Bill as Reds boss, adjacent to the eponymous gates opened in 1999.

And for **STEWARDS** – always there to help on matchdays. Indeed they've been recognised for providing outstanding customer service to fans. As part of a national joint-venture between the Barclays Premier League and VisitEngland, aimed at improving standards of fan experience at football stadia, a panel of industry experts from the tourism, football and customer service industries gave Liverpool FC's stewards the Warmest Welcome award.

The judges said: "First impressions count and there is no reason why that should be any different for football clubs from any other attraction. It costs nothing to be friendly but it can be very rewarding for all parties.

"We loved the stewarding at Liverpool because they clearly enjoy their job. There is a great rapport with the people they know but also an engagement for those who it might be their one and only Liverpool game of the season. Without doubt the warmest welcome we found in the Premier League was at Anfield."

"Without doubt the warmest welcome was at Anfield"



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And for **STANLEY HOUSE** – still standing at no73 Anfield Road, near the corner of the Centenary Stand, as a reminder of Liverpool FC's founding father. Built in 1873, this grand red-and-cream-bricked mansion was where John Houlding originally set up home. He'd progressed from working as a drayman delivering beer at Clarkson's Brewery in Soho Street, in the city's Islington district, to owning his own brewery in Everton's Tynemouth Street.

'Houlding's Sparkling Ales' were the tipple of choice in late Victorian Liverpool, and using profits from the brewery he set up home at Stanley House with his wife Jane and children Alice and William. With a garden and steepled tower overlooking (the then six-year-old) Stanley Park, it gave him the perfect base from which to keep an eye on the city's footballing affairs. It lay equidistant between the area of the park where Everton's forerunner St Domingo's played and the site where the Anfield ground took root in 1884.

Externally the privately-owned building is well preserved and a regular reminder of the man who played such a significant part in the club's history.

And for **SCOREBOARD** – installed at the corner of the Spion Kop and Centenary Stand as recently as 2003. Above it is the Match Control Room – eager-eyed Kopites can sometimes spot its instant action-replays!

"Stanley House is a reminder of the founding father of Liverpool FC"



And for **SANDON** – the public house on Oakfield Road where the players changed in the very early days of Liverpool Football Club, and today regularly used as a corporate hospitality venue by the club on matchdays.



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is for **THIS IS ANFIELD** – surely the most famous sign in any stadium's players tunnel. In July 2012 manager Brendan Rodgers asked for the original, introduced by Bill Shankly and a fixture for 24 years, to be reinstated. "When you come into a club you need to have a real sense of the past, a sense of the present and a sense of the future," said the Reds boss. "I just felt that this was a symbol of what Liverpool was for many years. It was taken down in 1998 but it was there from 1974 until that point, and the period of success within that was phenomenal. So for me it's a mark of the Anfield of old. We're very much in the modern era but it's important to remember the great past of this football club and the *This is Anfield* sign is a massive part of that. There's no doubt that Anfield is one of the most celebrated and historic venues in world football – never mind British football. So to put up the sign was just another little element of trying to restore the great days here to Anfield and that's something that we're hoping to do."

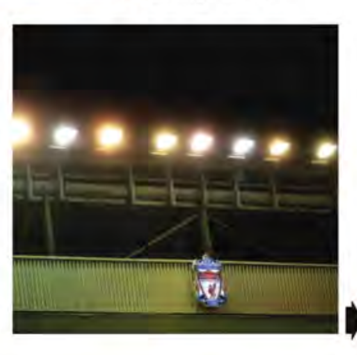
"We're very much in the modern era but should remember the past"



is for **UEFA REGULATIONS** – nothing beats a European night at Anfield but did you know that the strength of the floodlighting, for instance, must meet strict UEFA guidelines? From the group stage onwards, minimum 'illuminance' levels of 1,500 lux must be guaranteed. To put that into context, the average lux for office lighting is 500 lux, for TV studios 1,000, and for direct sunlight a whopping 32,000.

Down on the pitch, the height of the grass may not exceed 30mm and the entire playing surface must be cut to the same height for both the training sessions prior to the game and the match itself. The pitch must be watered evenly and, as a general rule, 60 minutes before kick-off. However, pitch watering may also take place after that time if the referee and both clubs agree, and provided it takes place between 10 and five minutes before kick-off or for a maximum of five minutes during the half-time interval.

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is for **VOICE OF ANFIELD** – the stadium's resident PA announcer and DJ is, of course, George Sephton. He's been doing it since the start of the 1970s, having previously spent a decade as a Kopite before moving to the Paddock as a season-ticket holder.

Last season, as part of the celebrations for 50 years of the club anthem, he wrote the following account for the matchday programme: "By the time I took over as the stadium announcer, the tradition of *You'll Never Walk Alone* was well-established. I wouldn't like to put money on how many games it was played before it became a permanent fixture, but I wouldn't have thought it was long. Gerry Marsden told me that they used to play the top 10 records before kick-off at Anfield, but when YNWA fell out of the top 10 a lot of people complained. So it carried on being played and snowballed from there.

"In theory there was no reason why it should have caught on. It was completely unlike anything that Gerry had brought out previously. His first couple of no1 hits had been written for him by Mitch Murray [a famous songwriter from the 1960s]. Gerry dug his heels in about YNWA although the record company thought he was crazy. Of course he's been proved right a million times over.

"I consider Liverpool to be the birthplace of rock or pop – however you define it – because of what happened in the Sixties, and the Kop would always sing songs by local artists.

That's one of the reasons why I like to I play records by so many local bands at Anfield. I've become renowned for it now but I am old enough to remember when The Beatles were playing for £10 a night around Liverpool – and having seen what's happened to these guys I'm a great believer in encouraging talent in whatever shape or form it takes.

"A couple of bands have said that the first recognition they had was being played at

"I like to play records by local bands and it can get great feedback"



Anfield. A lot of people have also phoned and emailed me and said they've had such a reaction because I've played one of their songs once at Anfield. That's a pleasure to hear but it's the magic of the Liverpool Football Club name.

"It's frightening to think it's 50 years since Gerry's version was released. If you'd gone back then and told Gerry what was going to happen half-a-century later – that he'd still be touring the world singing it and that football fans all over the world would be singing it – he would have thought you were crazy."



MEET THE face behind the voice . Anfield commentator George Sephton, o keeps you up to date with team ws, and doubles as our resident DJ at me matches.



GEORGE IS OUR MAN BEHIND THE 'MIKE'

GEORGE SEPHTON was, to use his own phrase, "a Koppite of long standing." But now he sees Liverpool from another angle, for the man who has been "a Liverpool fan ever since I was old enough to go to a football match", is our resident match-day D.J.

After 10 years of being a Koppite he acquired a paddock season ticket. Then he wrote to the club offering his services as a D.J., and Liverpool took him up on the offer. That was more than six years ago.

"Apart from the records—I link up with the hospitals for almost an hour before the game—I'm in touch with the police room on a 'hot line'.

"I try to be careful not to leave the 'mike' on when there's a sudden panic. Touch wood, nothing disastrous has happened so far . . ."



is for **WALK** – the one to the ground from whichever direction: through Stanley Park; up Utting Avenue; along Oakfield, Walton Breck or Back Rockfield. Part of every fan's matchday ritual whether they've parked up in their usual 'spec' or travelled by public transport, with one eye on the time and the other on the stadium hoving into view.















X is for **XABI** – as in Alonso, as in clear winner, by our reckoning anyway, of the longest-distance goal ever scored at Anfield. The Spanish midfielder's 60-yard effort came against Newcastle United on Wednesday 20 December 2006.



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is for **YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE** – writ large atop the Shankly Gates and in every Liverpool FC supporter's heart.

When Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein sat down in the early 1940s to write their second musical, little did they know what impact one of the show tunes would have. The Broadway hit Carousel was described by the New York Press as 'beautiful and beguiling, a fable of love, death and redemption'. It tells the story of a love affair between Billy, a travelling carnival worker, and Julie, a local factory girl. Desperate to support Julie and their unborn daughter when he loses his job, Billy is killed during an attempted robbery but is turned away at heaven's gate until he redeems himself on earth. In the second act Julie's cousin Nettie sings *You'll Never Walk Alone* to comfort her. It is reprised during the finale.

Gerry and the Pacemakers introduced the song to Liverpudlians in the early 1960s. It's since been recorded by more than 100 artists from Elvis Presley, Tom Jones and Pink Floyd to Barry Manilow, Kiri Te Kanawa and Katherine Jenkins.

Liverpool was the cultural capital of Britain at the time. Huyton MP Harold Wilson was less than 12 months away from heading a new Government, Everton were league champions and Bill Shankly was determined to displace them with his exciting team. Musically the city dominated the landscape too. On 3 October 1963 the BBC screened a documentary called *The Mersey Sound*. During the period from April 1963 to May 1964 the country's no1 single was recorded by a Liverpool artist for a staggering 51 weeks. One of those chart-toppers of course was YNWA.



Gerry Marsden recalls: "We were performing it around the clubs in Liverpool for more than a year before we recorded it because we loved the song so much. The audience would just stop, stand and listen. I just loved the words and melody. We recorded it and wanted it released. When I first heard George Martin's string score, it just gave it another bit of magic."

The band changed one of the lyrics slightly from 'Keep your chin up high' to 'Hold your head up high' and added more tempo and energy. It was released as the third single from their debut album *How Do You Like It?* and, like the first two, topped the charts, this time on 2 November 1963. That month YNWA was played closest to kick-off and inspired the Reds to 2-0 wins in consecutive home games as Bill Shankly's side marched towards the title. When the song fell out of the top 10, Kopites requested that it continue to be played.

Gerry's favourite memory was performing the song with the team on The Ed Sullivan Show when the Reds were touring America. A TV audience of 60 million saw it. "Afterwards Bill Shankly came over to me and said: 'Gerry son, I've given Liverpool a team – you've given us a song'."





Z is for… **ROW Z!** Reputedly the landing-place of plenty of misfired shots and passes at Anfield down the years. As far as we can tell, seeing as all of the rows at Anfield are numbered and not lettered, it doesn't actually exist…

ME MYSELF & IBE

Talking Championship football, Sturridge and Sterling, and forcing his way into the Reds first-team





It is midway through Jordon Ibe's first interview since returning to Melwood from his loan spell at Derby County when team-mate Daniel Sturridge hijacks the conversation.

"What are you doing?" Ibe asks forcefully as the centre-forward approaches, fiddling with the laces of his boots while attempting to listen in. The question left hanging with Ibe relates to the player at Liverpool he considers a role model. "You couldn't have asked that at a worst moment," he responds, pointing at Sturridge who cannot disguise his broad grin.

It is the most pleasant exchange between the pair in the minutes that follow, as they set about dismissing each other's views in the way that only friends are allowed. The topics discussed range from musical tastes to who would win in a 100m sprint. An agreement is reached on one point – that Lazar Markovic would beat both of them.

"I'm more confident than ever – it's up to me now to force my way in"


U21
L.F.C.

Once Sturridge departs to the training pitch, Ibe continues. "I enjoyed my time at Derby, it's a proper club," he says, reflecting on a four-month period where he scored five goals in 20 Championship matches for Steve McClaren's enterprising team. "I'm really happy to be back at Liverpool, though. This is where I want my career to be in the long-term. Some of the best players in the world are here and I'd include Studge in that category. When he's fit and firing again, it's going to be a massive lift for the whole club. He's a top-quality player. But I'd never say that if he was standing next to me."

At Derby, a club respected for its success in developing young players, it was the senior professionals that aided Ibe's development the most. "Will Hughes is the same age as me and he's brilliant," Ibe says of the England Under-21 midfielder who has had Premier League scouts flocking to the iPro Stadium since his debut three seasons ago. "He's so calm on the ball and never misses a pass. He takes responsibility for the team when he's in possession. Everybody trusts him.

"I took a lot from the older pros. In defence there was Jake Buxton and Richard Keogh, and in midfield John Eustace. They're all leaders. They set the standards. If there's a drop you know about it. If people on the outside saw the way the team was run, you'd soon understand why Derby are at the top of the league. There's a great mix of youth and experience. Everyone gets on well but if something needs to be said, it gets said."

In McClaren, Ibe found a manager not too different from Brendan Rodgers: an advocate of the passing game who prefers to play 4-3-3 and most importantly "someone who encourages you to play to your strengths." After Ibe's last goal for Derby at Birmingham City during a 4-0 victory on Boxing Day, his potential was described by McClaren as "phenomenal… Jordon is still learning but when he puts it all together, you can see what he is capable of doing. At times he is unplayable."

Ibe is equally complementary about McClaren's approach as a coach. "His training sessions are brilliant, he's really organised in the way he sets up a team and he's a big personality too. You can have a laugh with him at the right times and he understands how to release the pressure.

"I went to Derby on a youth loan, which meant Liverpool could call me back at any time. But the boss always made me feel an important part of his squad. It was as if I was there for the season, I wasn't treated differently to anyone else. It felt like a family.

"Defensively he [McClaren] made sure I knew my job, but when I was in the opposition half he just told me to go and get at players; to do my thing. He wanted me to express myself and make things happen. As an attacking player that's all you want.

"There was big competition for players in every position but particularly upfront. Chris Martin is probably the best striker in the Championship at the moment and just before I left the club signed Darren Bent who's got loads of experience. On the wings I was competing with full internationals, lads like Simon Dawkins [Jamaica], Johnny Russell [Scotland] and Jamie Ward [Northern Ireland]. Having that competition is really healthy."

"If you score or create goals it's hard for the boss not to pick you"

What Ibe enjoyed most was being a part of a winning team – the matchday build-up and playing in front of big crowds. "It gives you a massive lift. It's no disrespect to Under-21 football but when you're playing for points in the Championship you really feel it. When I scored on my debut against Cardiff I was buzzing for days. I wanted to experience that feeling again and again. It drove me on.

"Ultimately football is about scoring more goals than the opposition and




In action for Derby County

I've realised if I can contribute on that front, it makes it difficult for the manager not to pick you. Looking ahead, that's what I want to do more of: create goals and score more of them. You need to find a way to influence the results. If you can do that, you'll get in the team."

What does Ibe do now, then? He's back at Liverpool where he wants to be – yet the team is doing better than it was before, especially in attack where Rodgers seems to have a number of options available to him. By the time this article is published Sturridge is expected to be fit again. Then there is Raheem Sterling, Philippe Coutinho, Adam Lallana, Mario Balotelli, Rickie Lambert and Fabio Borini all vying for places as well as Lazar Markovic who has re-positioned to wing-back to find a space.

"Obviously, it's not going to be easy getting in the side," Ibe admits. "At Liverpool that's the way it should be. Nobody should be guaranteed a place and the players should always be creating pressure by training hard and giving everything during games. All of the players you mention are top-quality but after the spell at Derby I'm probably more confident than I've ever been. I thought I might have been there for the season but the manager [Rodgers] wants me back here. Its up to me now to force my way in."

"People compare me and Raheem but he's on a different level now"

While Ibe has been away, Sterling has emerged as Liverpool's most consistent performer. Sterling is exactly one year Ibe's senior to the day and the pair are often compared because of the positions they play. Ibe agrees that there are similarities, yet there are stylistic differences too. "I tend to drop a bit deeper to receive the ball and run long distances. Raheem is further up the pitch, doing the damage. I've heard a few people say stuff like me and Raheem could be Liverpool's wingers for a long time and of course that's flattering. But I don't tend to pay much attention to stuff like that. Raheem is on a different level at the moment. He's played nearly 100 games for Liverpool and I've not made it to five. I don't think I've made it yet, no way."

Ibe has an imposing physique for his age. There can be few 19-year-olds with broad shoulders and oxen thighs like his. He maintains that he is fortunate that his frame is a natural one. "I use the gym but I'm not in there all the time," he says. "I'm lucky that I'm naturally developing this way. Clearly you need a level of technical ability to play professionally. But when you step onto the pitch for a Premier League game all the players seem bigger. They're fully-grown men. You've got to be able to deal with that."

Ibe played adult football early. He made his senior debut for Wycombe Wanderers four seasons ago when he was aged 15 years and 244 days. A few months later he started a league game for the first time against Sheffield Wednesday. It took him just 29 minutes to become Wycombe's youngest goalscorer in history.

"I received the ball quite a way out," he recalls. "The manager Gary Waddock told me to run with it whenever I had the chance and there was a bit of space in front. So I just went, kept on running and ended up shooting from about 20 yards. When it flew in, I didn't know what to do with myself. My mum was standing at the other end [of the pitch] so I sprinted over and gave her a hug."

At being reminded that he was booked for his celebrations, he begins to laugh. "I've since scored goals for Birmingham and Derby. I'm desperate to do it for Liverpool now. But I don't want to just experience it once. I want to score as many as I can."

Words Simon Hughes

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Different coaches have different ways and means of motivating their players

Didi HAMANN



'The players aren't motivated' or 'the manager can't motivate the squad'. Such claims are regularly heard in football.

I never needed motivating. Playing football was my job, and a well-paid job too. A lot of fans all over the world would love to have been in the same situation. The truth is, though, not every player thinks the same way as I did. Some do need to be motivated.

How managers go about doing that varies tremendously. Before the 2005 Champions League final Rafa showed us footage of Liverpool's four previous European Cup wins. It was the biggest game of the season and he wanted to give us a boost.

It was the only time I can remember him doing anything like that. The effectiveness of showing such a DVD would quickly lose its impact. Can you imagine if Brendan Rodgers decided to show his players footage of Liverpool winning the league before every weekend fixture? By the third time most of them would be falling asleep. That approach needs to be used sparingly.

When Germany reached the 2002 World Cup final ex-striker Rudi Voller was in charge and he didn't feel we needed anything extra such as a DVD. Instead everything was kept the same as it had been going in to any other game. The build-up was as normal as possible.

Players are nervous anyway, some more than others. So managers often try to calm them down. If the build-up is too much, with all the talk centred on the trophy or what you might win, it can leave a team drained and then they suffer on the field.

In the past some managers tried to almost frighten players into performing. Giovanni Trapattoni was in charge at Bayern Munich when I played there and I think some people assumed that was how he worked. If anything he was the opposite before a game. He would only get wound up at half-time. I think that was part of his Italian character – he just has that kind of temperament. I don't think he was trying to motivate the players by frightening them. I think he just couldn't remain quiet if something was wrong.

"Building up games too much can drain players before they even start"



A word from the boss for his vice-captain

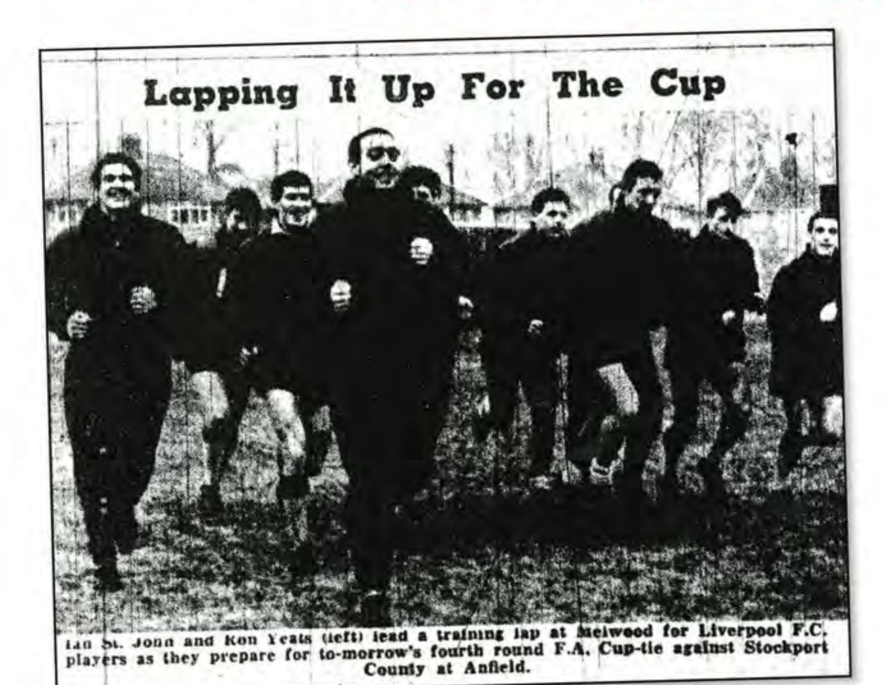
Rafa was different. He would remain quiet. He would sub you without saying anything. I think he accepted that people make mistakes – misplace a pass or miss a chance. It was tactical mistakes that really seemed to frustrate him. He was very shrewd and worked a lot on that side of the game. So if someone messed up the tactical plan he was very disappointed. He felt we'd worked on something all week so there was no way we should be uncertain about it on a Saturday. Knowing that you'd let him down made you want to make amends. So that was a form of motivation for the players.

I think Rafa's way of working was correct. There is no point in having a go at players, as it will probably only be effective the first time. Instead, they need to be encouraged as much as possible. If I went back in to management that would be my approach. Being a boss now is as much about man-management as anything else. If you are good at that part of the job then you have a much greater chance of succeeding.

Follow Didi on Twitter @DietmarHamann

"Shanks the radio a believe

Next in our series celebrating half-a-century since Liverpool FC first won the FA Cup: it took two games to take care of League basement boys Stockport County



Lapping It Up For The Cup

Ian St. John and Ron Yeats (left) lead a training lap at Melwood for Liverpool F.C. players as they prepare for to-morrow's fourth round F.A. Cup-tie against Stockport County at Anfield.

turned on nd couldn't the score"

Saturday 30 January 1965. Liverpool's reward for their drama-filled FA Cup victory over West Brom at The Hawthorns in round three was a home tie against Stockport County.

The Cheshire side were propping up the Football League, five points adrift of Bradford City, and had won only four of their 28 Fourth Division fixtures to that point. Therefore their third-round win over Bristol Rovers had been something of a surprise.

Liverpool had made a stuttering start to their own league campaign and sat ninth in the First Division table. For the first time, they had the demands of European football to contend with, having reached the quarter-finals of the European Cup where they were set to face German team Cologne.

Of course half-a-century ago Bill Shankly was unable to call upon the kind of scouting network that Premier League clubs enjoy today. So, given that 83 places separated Liverpool and Stockport in the Football League standings, he felt it safe to travel to Germany to run the rule over Cologne – leaving Bob Paisley and Reuben Bennett in charge of events at Anfield.

Shankly felt it was safe to leave Bob and Reuben in charge of the team

Left: Echo picture from Melwood before the tie

As things transpired, Liverpool's passage to the FA Cup's fifth round was anything but smooth.

The match was played against a backdrop of a nation in mourning following the death of Winston Churchill and his state funeral was held at St Paul's Cathedral on the same day as this tie. Almost 52,000 inside Anfield saw Liverpool make a slow start and goalkeeper Tommy Lawrence had to react smartly to deny Len White, an experienced striker formerly with Newcastle United and Huddersfield Town, before visiting winger Johnny Watt spurned a promising moment after he'd got the better of Gerry Byrne.

Journalist Leslie Edwards reported in the *Liverpool Echo*: "Stockport kept Liverpool in their own half for nearly all the opening few minutes and the Liverpool defence, with the ball bouncing high and sometimes unpredictably, looked indefinite in their work."

The Reds continued to struggle and Stockport's efforts brought tangible reward when White fired high into the net after 18 minutes after Lawrence



could only parry a cross-shot from Watt. Finally stirred from their lethargy, Tommy Smith forced County keeper Ken Mulhearn into two fine saves before half-time, but it was the visitors who went into the interval with their lead intact. They even felt aggrieved that a penalty appeal had been

The two matches

LIVERPOOL 1 STOCKPORT COUNTY 1
FA CUP FOURTH ROUND 30.01.65 ANFIELD
GOALS: Milne (51); White (18)
ATTENDANCE: 51,851
LIVERPOOL: Lawrence; Lawler, Byrne; Milne, Yeats, Stevenson; Callaghan, Hunt, St John, Smith, Thompson.
STOCKPORT: Mulhearn; Collins, Cuthbert; Eckersall, Parry, Porteous; Watt, White, Sandiford, Hodgkinson, Phoenix.

STOCKPORT COUNTY 0 LIVERPOOL 2
FOURTH ROUND REPLAY
03.02.65 EDGELEY PARK
GOALS: Hunt (39, 85) ATTENDANCE: 24,080
STOCKPORT: Mulhearn; Collins, Cuthbert; Eckersall, Parry, Porteous; Watt, White, Sandiford, Hodgkinson, Phoenix.
LIVERPOOL: Lawrence; Lawler, Byrne; Milne, Yeats, Stevenson; Callaghan, Hunt, St John, Smith, Thompson.

"The fans spilled onto the pitch in the replay but we played better"

turned down after inside-forward Derek Hodgkinson tumbled under a challenge from Chris Lawler.

The play continued to ebb and flow after the break and Liverpool levelled six minutes into the second half thanks to a fine piece of opportunism from Gordon Milne, who swivelled to hit a low shot through a ruck of players and just inside the post.

Liverpool stepped up the tempo and ace marksman Roger Hunt tested Mulhearn before Ian Callaghan had a penalty claim turned down after he was stopped by Stockport player-boss Trevor Porteous.

Yet in the end, Liverpool needed a last-ditch clearance from Byrne to protect the 1-1 scoreline and earn a replay. No internet or mobile phones back then, of course, so the first Shankly had heard of the result was on his return from the spying mission on Cologne.

In his autobiography, Reds striker Ian St John recalled: "As he [Shankly] was coming through the airport in Manchester some of the workers greeted him. 'Hello, boys,' he said, before asking if there had been any Cup surprises while he was away. 'Only your draw with Stockport, Bill,' he was told.

'Aye, you have a nice sense of humour today, boys,' he replied as he collected his bag and strode off in his best Jimmy Cagney style. Then he turned on the car radio and realised the baggage handlers hadn't been joking. He came rushing back to

4th round results...

LIVERPOOL 1 STOCKPORT CO 1
STOCKPORT CO 0 LIVERPOOL 2 (REPLAY)
PRESTON NE 1 BOLTON W 2
SOUTHAMPTON 1 CRYSTAL PALACE 2
READING 1 BURNLEY 1
BURNLEY 1 READING 0 (REPLAY)
LEICESTER C 5 PLYMOUTH A 0
WOLVES 2 ROTHERHAM UTD 2
ROTHERHAM UTD 0 WOLVES 3
SUNDERLAND 1 NOTTM FOREST 3
SHEFFIELD UTD 0 ASTON VILLA 2
TOTTENHAM H 5 IPSWICH T 0
WEST HAM UTD 0 CHELSEA 1
MILLWALL 1 SHREWSBURY T 2
SWANSEA T 1 HUDDERSFIELD T 0
CHARLTON A 1 MIDDLESBRO 1
MIDDLESBRO 2 CHARLTON 1 (REPLAY)
LEEDS UTD 1 EVERTON 1
EVERTON 1 LEEDS UTD 2 (REPLAY)
STOKE C 0 MAN UTD 0
MAN UTD 1 STOKE C 0 (REPLAY)
PETERBOROUGH UTD 2 ARSENAL 1



Cuthbert was too late to prevent St. John getting in his shot but Mulhearn was there to save.

Stockport Lead—Then Hold On For A Shock Replay

BONETTI NEEDS ALL HIS AGILITY

Foils West Ham Attack

How the press reported the first tie's drama

Anfield for a crisis meeting in the Boot Room. There, Bob Paisley and Reuben Bennett took quite a bit of time assuring him that in his brief absence the world he had been building with such force had not fallen completely off its axis."

The Saint continued: "Naturally Bob and Reuben didn't dwell too long on how near we had been to catastrophe while he was away – or how Gerry Byrne kept us alive by kicking the ball off the line in the last minutes."

The same 22 players lined-up at Edgeley Park four days later, half of them presumably having recently had a strip or two torn off them. Liverpool took advantage of their second chance, winning 2-0 with goals from Hunt towards the end of each half.

A slightly calmer Shankly said afterwards: "We played much better in the replay and I remember there was a terrific atmosphere. Edgeley Park is a tight ground and the crowd was almost spilling on to the pitch all throughout the game."

Mission accomplished – just about. Next up in Liverpool FC's pursuit of a first FA Cup triumph was a short trip to Second Division promotion-chasers Bolton Wanderers at Burnden Park...

Get the book!

Mark Platt's book *Cup Kings: Liverpool 1965* is now available as an ebook to commemorate the 50th anniversary of one of the greatest days in the club's history. A must-read or all Reds, it re-lives that unforgettable cup run with a comprehensive round-by-round account including interviews with the key players involved. Available now at Amazon.



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“I LIKE ATTA &



TO CK SCORE GOALS"

But Lazar Markovic is also happy to add a new defensive dimension to his game – because "different is good" he tells Simon Hughes

Lazar Markovic is revisiting the "extreme" pressure when he was 17 years old and thought of as the brightest prospect in a generation at Partizan Belgrade – a club where he helped achieve "the minimum" requirement of winning the Serbian league title in the three seasons he was there as a professional.

His memory drifts back to May 2011 when he was a youth-team player. "By October I was an international. My career progressed very quickly. Nobody recognises you, then suddenly everybody does. Every single move – it is analysed. That's on the pitch, off it. An intense situation."

Liverpool spent £20 million for Markovic last summer, signing him following a successful year spent in Portugal with Benfica. He recognises the burden of expectation at Anfield because he has faced it before. He refers to Liverpool as an "institution," one that is rich in European history. Yet in Serbia he believes Partizan is the biggest club, casting city rivals Red Star to one side in terms of popularity. "At a weekend you win and everything is okay, you can live and be happy," he smiles. Then he describes what happens after a defeat: "It is as if somebody has died. That is not an exaggeration."

Dealing with this is linked to Liverpool because he then speaks of the "disappointment in the eyes" of the supporters whenever he left the Anfield pitch having not contributed towards a victory at the beginning of this season. He rejects, however, the suggestion that a 20-year-old moving country for the second time in as many summers might be expected to find the transition tough.



"Whether it's in Belgrade, Lisbon or Liverpool I expect to play well"





That shot that hit the Sunderland frame

"I did not think it would a straightforward," he says firmly. "But the standards I set myself mean I wanted more from my performances. Whether I play in Belgrade, Lisbon or Liverpool, I expect to do well. A footballer's career is short so you can't afford to wait. I wanted to be at the top of my game. I realise the season began with difficulty for everyone. The improvement since has been real, though."

This interview takes place a couple of days after Markovic scored his first Liverpool goal in the league. A 1-0 win at Sunderland's Stadium of Light meant it also proved to be the points-clinching moment. Yet Markovic was frustrated that he was not involved in two more goals. In the opening minutes his penalty appeals were dismissed despite a clear foul by John O'Shea. Later his volley, executed unconventionally, mid-air like a ninja kicking an adversary, crashed off Sunderland's crossbar. "We won and that's the most important thing," he says. "But I always ask for more. You can always do better."

He explains that his quest for self-improvement has intensified since becoming a Liverpool player. He considers it a journey that should never end. "Here at Melwood I see Steven Gerrard training every day and his levels never drop. He is one of the greatest players. He is nearly 35 years old but his drive remains. He is an example to all of the players. It is an example I follow."

Markovic's own career began following his older brother, Filip. The pair were born in Cacak, a small agricultural town that is a 90-minute drive from Belgrade. It is a place famed for its monasteries but it was football rather than a religious path that the pair were determined to embark upon. Filip was 14 and Lazar 12 when in 2006 Filip was asked to join Partizan's youth teams. "They really wanted Filip and me maybe not so much," Lazar admits. "The club did a lot to persuade the family that it was a good idea to leave Cacak. He was a big talent, very skilful and a bit taller than me. He played a lot in the centre and linked the play between midfield and attack. Everybody knew about his ability, but our father did not want him to go to Belgrade alone. So I went too."

Soon, Lazar became Partizan's second Markovic. When he later moved to Benfica, it was at the request of the family that this time Filip accompanied him instead. Filip had been farmed out to a team called Teleoptik, and in Portugal he was allocated to the reserves.

"When I left Benfica last summer, Filip moved to Mallorca in Spain. It is the first time we have been apart in many years, so this experience in Liverpool is different. But we are growing up now. I still speak to him most days. We have the confidence to be apart."

Markovic believes his progression from Serbia to Portugal then to England, although quick, has been a natural trail. Dusan Tadic, the Southampton winger who spent four seasons in Holland – compared to Markovic's one abroad before becoming a Premier League player (Tadic is also six years Markovic's senior) – recently told a newspaper that by moving away from his homeland in 2010 he instantly felt able to express himself because he was able just to focus on football.

"Gerrard's levels never drop – he is one of the greatest players"

"When I was in Vojvodina [his home province in northern Serbia] it is not possible to describe," Tadic said. "If you play one bad ball, one mistake, they are: oh, what is that? Then some players they are afraid to take responsibility. You don't have freedom to show yourself. The coaches like you to fight and that's it. Because of that, lots of players always play better when they go somewhere else."

Markovic has fonder memories of playing for Partizan because they won most weekends and his coaches were attack-minded. One of them was Avram Grant, formerly of Chelsea. "On the outside there was, of course, an unbelievable pressure. But inside it was usually relaxed. My managers trusted me, I always felt that. This is huge for any player. The league was hard and very physical but this is only a good thing. I probably needed to toughen up."

It was in the 'eternal derby' with Red Star that Markovic learnt most about the rivalry in football, one which forces "the whole of Belgrade to shut down for the entire week" while "the squads of both teams are camped inside hotels to escape the tension. If you do not realise the feeling involved between Partizan and Red Star, you do then."

Markovic would announce himself in another derby by scoring an equaliser for Benfica when they were 1-0 down to Sporting within a month of moving





Time out in training

"We need to keep winning and I need to keep growing at this club"

to Portugal. It involved scuttling between four opponents from near the halfway-line before placing a shot underneath the legs of Portuguese international goalkeeper Rui Patricio.

It was the demonstration of such electric pace and poise that prompted Liverpool to sign him. There had been suggestions that Markovic was bound for Chelsea. While Jose Mourinho usually recruits the finished product, Liverpool operate in a different transfer market, trying to recruit targets at an earlier stage of development. His personal reasons for choosing Anfield are clear. "I watch a lot of football on television and last season Liverpool were the best team in the Premier League. Liverpool were close to being champions. The football played was really exciting. As soon as Liverpool made the offer I made it clear that I wanted to come here and the deal was settled quite easily. The manager wants the team to attack and score goals. This is the football I like most."

It is ironic, then, that Markovic has since found form in a position that involves more defensive responsibilities. When told by Brendan Rodgers to finish the final 22 minutes of the 3-0 defeat to Manchester United at left-wing-back, he admits that he did not envisage it leading to a regular place, the period coinciding with the team's resurgence. "At Partizan I was a winger or sometimes a no10. At Benfica I was a winger. With the national team it is the same. In Serbia people do not recognise me for my defensive qualities. Sometimes you have to move away from what is comfortable to regain something in your game. I have approached my career in this way. Different is good."

Rodgers agrees that Markovic is settling well in English football, insisting after the Sunderland game that his speed and aggression had helped break down a team that just a few months ago returned to the North East from Anfield with a credible scoreless draw.

That Markovic learnt Portuguese during his year in Lisbon meant he could communicate with Liverpool's Brazilian pair Lucas and Coutinho as well as some of the slower-speaking Spanish players straightaway. He is still learning English but feels comfortable enough to conclude this interview by talking about his aims for the rest of the season without the aid of the interpreter.

"I feel very, very good here," he says. "It is important that we carry on winning because then the squad is happy and it is easier for new players like me to grow with the club. A few weeks ago, people were saying the Champions League next season is not possible. We are a still a few points away from the top four. But we are fighting."

The Partizan production line

Andrija Zivkovic

A winger who can also play through the middle, in October 2013 he became Serbia's youngest full international during a friendly against Japan, aged 17 years and three months. Four months later he became the youngest player ever to captain Partizan Belgrade. Linked with Chelsea and Benfica.

Danilo Pantic

A midfielder who has been watched by some of Europe's biggest clubs since the age of 14. He's been linked with Chelsea too, drawing comparisons to their fellow Serbian powerhouse Nemanja Matic. Has played over 20 games for Partizan and has represented his country at youth level.

Nikola Ninkovic

The attacking midfielder has been hailed as one of the brightest talents in European football. He signed his first pro contract at the same time as Markovic and has made over 50 appearances for Partizan. Nominated for this year's European Golden Boy award which was won by Liverpool's Raheem Sterling.



Ninkovic (right) in Europa League action v Spurs

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ONE NIGHT IN DORTMUND

For LFC it was the third leg of a cup treble, for Alaves the end of a fantastic journey, writes Simon Hughes



In 2001, Deportivo Alaves, from the Basque town of Vitoria-Gasteiz, stunned Europe's football establishment by reaching the final of the UEFA Cup. Their emergence was remarkable. When the Cup Winners Cup was disbanded in 1999, critics argued that it would become more difficult for less-heralded teams to achieve success in European competition.The fear was, those clubs rewarded for elimination from the Champions League with re-entry to the rebranded UEFA Cup in the second half of the season, would block the progression of sides that had plotted their way through the early rounds. Galatasaray won it this way in 2000.

Alaves defied the odds. Theirs was a squad of journeymen, low-budget South American signings, youngsters cast off by Spain's biggest clubs, and it was good enough to push Liverpool all the way. "A few years ago we were a village team that on the map, nobody could see," said their most experienced midfielder, Ibon Begona. "Now supporters can point – they know where we are."

Alaves had only been promoted to La Liga in 1998, 12 years after suffering demotion to Spain's regional leagues following a financial collapse. It was their first stint in the top flight since 1956 and despite being tipped to go straight back down, coach Jose Manuel Esnal – commonly known as Mane – kept them up by operating shrewdly in the transfer market. The following campaign, they finished in sixth and improbably qualified for Europe.

In the UEFA Cup first round, expectations were low as Alaves prepared to play Gaziantepspor, a club from Turkey based not far from the Syrian border, especially after a scoreless first-leg draw in Spain. In the return match Alaves won 4-3 thanks to two late goals from Ivan Tomic, a Serbian midfielder recruited from Roma for a nominal fee.

The next three rounds followed the same formula. There were draws at home to Lillestrom and Rosenborg of Norway, as well as Inter Milan, before



comfortable victories away. In the San Siro, goals by Tomic and Jordi Cruyff, son of the great Johan, prompted Marca to claim Alaves were the best team in Spain ahead of Real Madrid and Barcelona.

In the quarter-final Rayo Vallecano inflicted defeat on Alaves for the first time on their European run – 2-1 in the second leg – though it was not enough to halt their march to the semis where Germany's Kaiserslautern were thrashed 9-2 on aggregate.

Alaves possessed few players in their squad who had played in Europe before, let alone in a final. Yet the final in Dortmund awaited, where they would meet Liverpool, who had knocked out Rapid Bucharest, Slovan Liberec, Olympiacos, Roma, Porto and Barcelona en route. "We look towards [defender] Dan Eggen and Cruyff for ideas," Begona said. "They have experience of playing against and beating Liverpool."

Cruyff Jnr had come up against Liverpool as a Manchester United player, while Eggen had scored the winning goal at Anfield while playing for Brondby in the same competition five years earlier. He later described the moment as "the most important" of his

"A few years ago we were a village team – now people know us"

career, as it secured a move to Spain with Celta Vigo then Alaves. "We didn't have a lot of money but everyone was able," recalls the big Norwegian. "We had a group of players who wanted the best for one another. It was the kind of morale that we had in Brondby, too, in that we weren't the best technical team but all functions of the team worked equally well. We were all disciplined and desperately wanted the same thing and that's why we achieved what we did."

Alaves' other key players included leading goalscorer Javi Moreno, dynamic right-back Cosmin Contra and Argentinan goalkeeper Martin Herrera. Each one been signed for less than £200,000. "The most important thing for the club was the relationship between the president,



Anton Gonzalez, and the manager Mane," Eggen insists. "They both had the same ideas about the way the club should be run and their unity reflected in the unity of the players as well."

Eggen believes that the 2000/01 season was his career-best. Pursuits in Europe affected domestic performance with Alaves finishing in 10th place, albeit above regional heavyweights Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad. "The Basque country has a proud football heritage. It was unthinkable

Gary Mac's goal wins it in dramatic fashion

for Alaves to finish above Bilbao and Sociedad, but we made it happen."

For Liverpool, the UEFA Cup was a clear chance to win European silverware for the first time in 17 years. Victory would also mean a cup treble for the Reds after securing the Worthington Cup earlier in the season via a shoot-out over Birmingham City as well as the FA Cup just four days before by beating Arsenal.

For Eggen, the final in Dortmund quickly turned into a nightmare. "Markus Babbel scored, then Steven Gerrard scored. We were 2-0 down inside the first 20 minutes. The manager had to change something, so I was substituted. I'd played every minute of every game on the way to the final up until that point. So not to be able to play my part in such an important game hurt a lot."

Eggen's early exit is a mere footnote in the story, considering the drama that followed. At full-time the scoreline was 4-4 after Alaves had recovered on two occasions to draw level. Then, just as a penalties seemed certain, Alaves right-back Delfi Geli headed Gary McAllister's free-kick into his own net, Liverpool prevailing on the golden-goal rule.

Eggen retired in 2004 following brief spells with Glasgow Rangers and Le Mans in France, and studied philosophy at the University of Oslo. He is now the co-owner of a record company and manages a rock band. "This game was the moment for Alaves to claim their place in history," he concludes. "With a win, maybe we could have kept one or two players in the future. But we didn't and everything went wrong."

Six months later, just before Christmas 2001, Alaves topped La Liga for the first time in 71 years. Although they continued to breach Spain's recognised hierarchy by finishing seventh that season, thus qualifying for the UEFA Cup again, key players left the club in the months after the defeat to Liverpool.

Moreno and Contra joined AC Milan for a combined fee of £20 million, while goalkeeper Herrera signed for Fulham and Ivan Alonso, scorer of the first goal against Liverpool, later joined Murcia. None of the players, though, reproduced the form first shown at Alaves and, like the Basque club, their fortunes took a turn for the worse.

After a season in Italy, where he scored only two goals in 16 Serie A starts, Moreno went back to Spain, joining Atletico Madrid. He was soon on the move again and played for Bolton, Real Zaragoza and Cordoba before finishing his career in Ibiza.

Contra returned to La Liga in the same deal that took Moreno to Atletico. The Romanian was sent off for West Bromwich Albion during a 5-0 defeat



Jordi Cruyff makes it 4-4 in the last minute of normal time

to Liverpool in 2004. After playing for and managing Getafe, he moved to China in January, taking charge of Guangzhou.

With the money accrued from the sales of Moreno and Contra, only £2.5m went towards new signings, yet Mane still managed to bring in eight players. Ruben Navarro cost £1.5m from Numancia, while £1m was spent on Bogdan Mara from Romanian side Arges Pitesti. Two others came on frees and four on loan, including Argentinain centre-back Fabricio Coloccini who now plays for Newcastle United.

Although these deals initially proved moderately successful, Alaves were

"We had a group of players who just wanted the best for each other"

relegated in 2003. Mane resigned immediately and has since taken charge of Levante as well as Athletic Bilbao. His last position was at Espanyol in 2009.

Failed signings and failed managers arrived as quickly as they departed: Jardel, formerly with Bolton, John Aloisi of Portsmouth and Coventry City, as well as Boca Juniors striker Martin Palermo, all had unsuccessful spells at the Mendizorroza Stadium. Despite another promotion back to La Liga in 2005, Alaves were relegated again 12 months later and have since spent time in the third tier. At the time of writing they were 12th in the Segunda Division.

Guillem Balague, Sky's Spanish football expert, believes the club's fall can be traced to 2004 when owner Gonzalez sold up to Ukranian-American businessman Dimitry Pietrman, who had previously owned Palamos – Catalonia's oldest club, beating Barcelona by one year – and Racing Santander. "Wherever Pietrman went in Spain he used the same manager – a guy called Chuchi



"If we'd beaten Liverpool we might have had more success"

Cruyff: now 40 and managing Maccabi Tel Aviv

Cos who was just his friend. He thought that he could get a licence to sit upon the bench with Chuchi and influence games by directing operations.

"Pietrman said that he'd watched teams train in North American soccer and he thought he would be able to use that knowledge in Spain. But it did not work. Ever since Alaves have struggled to compete even in the Second Division because all the good players got fed up with his ways and decided to leave."

Although Pietrman has since departed, Balague doubts whether Alaves will return to La Liga any time soon. "They were the first team in Spain to really come from nowhere and achieve something. Villarreal have used their model as an inspiration and have since more than matched their achievements, the main difference being that they have a long-term business plan to help them.

"Villarreal are a club with no tradition of football at all and Valencia are the main club in that region. But they have built a club from scratch, using a reliable president [Fernando Roig] and a series of good managers to scour the South American transfer market for talent to bring success. And now they have an infrastructure which means their youth system is now producing players of their own as well.

"This never happened at Alaves and this is why they find themselves in such a dangerous position today."

Subcampeones: Spain's losers

Not often that a Spanish club loses in the final of a major European tournament? It's actually happened 22 times down the years, with both Real Madrid and Barcelona having lost five finals.

Real have lost three European Cup finals – most recently to Liverpool in Paris in 1981 – and two Cup Winners Cup finals. So have Barca, defeated most recently – and comprehensively by AC Milan in the 1994 Champions League final.

Atletico Madrid, twice Europa League winners in recent years, were beaten finalists in last season's Champions League final and the European Cup final 40 years earlier. They've also finished runners-up in two Cup Winners Cup finals.

Three clubs have lost two finals each: Valencia in the 2001 and 2000 Champions League (below); Athletic Bilbao in the 2012 Europa League and 1977 UEFA Cup; and Espanyol in the 2007 and 1988 UEFA Cup.





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COME ON YOU REDS!

On the eve of a new Women's Super League season Liverpool Ladies supporter Heather Carroll hopes for three in a row

Looking back

The 2014 Women's Super League was the most fiercely contested season in the league's short history. Liverpool Ladies entered the campaign as reigning champions, meaning other teams looked to the Reds as the ones to beat. Birmingham City topped the table at the midway stage with Chelsea Ladies emerging as favourites towards the end of the year.

As it stood on the final day of the season, three teams could win the title. Chelsea were in pole position, needing just a point at Manchester City while, should the Londoners slip, Birmingham only had to win away to a Notts County side with just three league wins to their name at home. If the unthinkable were to happen, with Chelsea and Birmingham failing to get the results they needed, Liverpool Ladies could rise from third to first by beating Bristol Academy by at least two goals.

At half-time news spread through the stands that Chelsea and Birmingham were both losing and, despite a plethora of chances, Liverpool's match somehow remained goalless. Out for the second half and aware that results elsewhere were in their favour, the Reds went all out – putting three goals past Bristol Academy. Lucy Bronze opened the scoring, powering forward from right-back while top scorer Natasha Dowie scored one and won the penalty from which Fara Williams converted to make it 3-0. Liverpool had done all they could, and then came the agonising wait for results to come in elsewhere.

To be in this position come the end of the season was an exceptional achievement for everyone involved at the club after a rollercoaster campaign. Entering the year as reigning champions and adding strength to the side with four new signings, Liverpool's season was shaken before it could begin. New arrival Lucy Staniforth ruptured her ACL ruling her out for the entire campaign; a week later key first-team player Nicole Rolser did the same; and just days before the season-opener Katie Zelem broke her collarbone.

By the second league game Liverpool lost goalkeeper Libby Stout to concussion and Martha Harris and Kate Longhurst also picked up injuries. This led to a number of players making the step-up from the club's


One for the album at Anfield last year

development squad (the FA WSL Development League is equivalent to the men's Under 21s side). That the youth players integrated so well into the senior squad is a great credit to the staff and players and will only benefit them in the long term.

On the final day of the season Liverpool had all but one of their injured players back and had fought over the last weeks of the season to be in the position they were in – a late win at Birmingham and last-minute equaliser against Arsenal demonstrating their desire to fight to the very end for their crown.

Liverpool's match finished before their title challengers and it wasn't until one of the corporate boxes above the stands erupted with cheers that supporters and players knew that somehow, against all odds, Liverpool Ladies were league champions once again!

The exciting end to the league campaign was a great advert for the women's game in England. The fact that three teams could have won the title going into the last minutes of the season underlined the competitive nature of the competition. That is testament to the work being put into women's football and in particular at LFC, who ended Arsenal Ladies' dominance of the league – the Gunners finished fourth in 2014 whereas prior to 2013 they'd won the top honours in league football for 11 consecutive years.

Looking forward

The WSL is improving every year and as more teams turn professional the standard rises and the league continues to expand – 2015 will see two teams promoted from the FA WSL2. Last season promotion and relegation was introduced for the first time, Everton Ladies dropping into FA WSL2 and Sunderland Ladies going up. The eventual aim of the FA is to allow promotion and relegation throughout all tiers of women's football in England.

For Liverpool Ladies the aim this year will once again to be to lift the league title. And, from the supporters' point of view, it would also be great to have a cup run. Last season the team exited the FA Cup in the quarter-finals and failed to get out of their Continental Cup (the ladies' League Cup) group while their Champions League debut ended after a 4-2 aggregate defeat to Swedish cup-winners Linkopings.

Coverage of women's football is steadily growing in the mainstream media, with Sky Sports News reporting on transfer news and the big games and BT Sport having a weekly highlights show plus live coverage of a number of league and cup matches.

Liverpool Ladies' average league attendance was a healthy 740 and I would certainly encourage Liverpool fans who have yet to see the team in action to go along to the Select Security Stadium and sample the experience. Entry to the women's home matches is just £5, with season-tickets priced at only £30, which includes admission to all league, FA Women's Cup and Continental Cup fixtures. Those who hold season-tickets for the men's matches at Anfield can also use them for Liverpool Ladies home games and can expect a great

Get your season-tickets to see the reigning champions now!

can expect a great atmosphere in the stands during the matches. Liverpool supporters are renowned worldwide for the atmosphere they create and fans of the women's side also have their own repertoire of songs. After matches, the players are very approachable and happy to interact with the supporters – last season they even held an open training session for season-ticket holders.

Silverware could come as early as May for Liverpool with the development squad currently topping their league table and beating teams with ease in the cup. The youth side have won their last 10 games in a row, conceding only one goal and striker Ashley Hodson netting four hat-tricks.

Things also look bright for the first team. With Nicole Rolser and Lucy Staniforth both returning from injury, four exciting new signings and the youth players who gained valuable playing time with the first team last season, the squad is looking stronger than ever with depth in each position.

Follow Heather on Twitter **@LFCladiesfans.** Her blog is at **liverpoolladiesfans.blogspot.co.uk.**



Season-tickets for 2015 are priced at £30 for adults and £15 for children under 16 and concessions. Family tickets (two children and two adults) are £60. The tickets include entry to all seven WSL fixtures plus home FA Cup and Continental Cup matches. They can be purchased online at www.liverpoolfc.com/ladiestickets

THE 2015 TITLE RACE



Black Cats up first for the champions...

Liverpool Ladies will start their defence of the FA WSL title with a home game against newly-promoted Sunderland Ladies on Wednesday 25 March.

Manager Matt Beard says: "I'm delighted that we will begin with a home game in Widnes and hopefully we can get a great crowd at the Select Security Stadium. Sunderland will provide a stern test as they are an exciting, young side so we'll need to be prepared."

The Reds are sure to be pushed all the way by several sides including Manchester City Women, whose new signings include Liverpool defender Lucy Bronze. The Reds face City twice in the space of five potentially pivotal days in April.

Ex-Red Lucy Bronze (left) is now with Manchester City

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MARCH			
Sun 22	tbc	FAC 5	
Wed 25	SUNDERLAND	WSL	7.45pm
APRIL			
Wed 1	BIRMINGHAM	WSL	7.30pm
Sun 12	as drawn	FAC 6	
Sun 19	Chelsea	WSL	2pm
Sat 25	MAN CITY	WSL	5.30pm
Wed 29	Man City	WSL	
MAY			
Sun 3	tbc	FAC SF	
Sun 10	Notts County	WSL	5pm
JULY			
Sun 12	Arsenal	WSL	2pm
Sat 18	NOTTS CO	WSL	5.30pm
Sun 26	Birmingham	WSL	2pm
AUGUST			
Sat 1	tbc	FAC final	
Sat 8	Sunderland	WSL	6.30pm
Sat 22	BRISTOL AC	WSL	5.30pm
SEPTEMBER			
Sat 5	ARSENAL	WSL	5.30pm
Sat 12	tbc	Cont Cup QF	
Sat 26	CHELSEA	WSL	5.30pm
OCTOBER			
Sun 4	Bristol Ac	FWSL	2pm
Wed 7	tbc	UCL R32 1L	
Sat 11	tbc	Cont Cup SF	
Wed 14	tbc	UCL R32 2L	
NOVEMBER			
Sun 1 or 8	tbc	Cont Cup final	
Wed 11	tbc	UCL R16 1L	
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Making it as a striker has never been tougher – but it's worth it

Neil MELLOR



The role of the centre-forward has changed a lot in the last 20 years. Growing up at Liverpool, I played upfront in a two with Brian McIlroy. It was a solid partnership. If I didn't score, Brian usually did. I was no9 and he was no10. We fed off each other's qualities.

Football was changing by the time I reached the first team squad. In the years before, Liverpool had played with two strikers. Gerard Houllier would rotate between Michael Owen, Robbie Fowler and Emile Heskey. During one first-team match Houllier pulled me to one side and said that he didn't want me moving wider than the width of the 18-yard box anymore. He wanted me centrally for the whole game rather than running in the channels. Over the next few years football went that way, with the 4-2-3-1 formation becoming popular and a playmaking midfielder rather than a striker wearing the no10 shirt.

Trends in football move in cycles. At the moment lots of teams are playing with false no9s. Barcelona's Lionel Messi was the first and Manchester City have since had some success with Sergio Aguero that way, and to a degree Liverpool did too with Luis Suarez, although he didn't drop quite as deep as the other two.

For the time being the old-fashioned goal-poacher is redundant, but I'm sure his value will return soon enough. This could be good news for someone like Jerome Sinclair, who is only 18 years old and could end up reaching the point of maturity at the right time in terms of the way football is played.

Sinclair is a classic no9 who plays for Liverpool's Under-21s. He made his full debut in the first team two seasons ago at West Brom and has had to be patient since then for another chance.

"Trends in football come and go – now a lot of teams have false no9s"



LFC U21 starlets Harry Wilson, Jerome Sinclair and Sergi Canos

What I like most about him is he gives himself the maximum opportunity to score goals by lurking between the posts. At the end of last month he scored past Victor Valdes in a game against Man United's U21s. It should give him huge belief, beating someone with as many medals as Valdes. I remember scoring past Paul Robinson when he was England's goalkeeper. I was buzzing for a week.

Especially at a top club, striker is the most difficult position to make your mark because it's usually dominated by seasoned internationals. There is more pressure on strikers. Ultimately if you want to win matches you need to score goals and most managers are willing to spend more money on achieving that. In recent years the only one to come through at a big club is James Wilson at United, and he's not a certified starter just yet.

In English football this season we have seen four young players in the goalscoring charts, yet you couldn't describe any of them as prodigies because they've had to bide their time. Charlie Austin at QPR had been in non-league football before working his way up to the Premier League. Harry Kane had four loan spells at lower-league clubs before becoming first-choice striker at Tottenham. Then there's Danny Ings, who like me suffered with bad injuries before hitting the goal trail at Burnley, as well as Saido Berahino who was 20 or 21 before he started making his mark at West Brom.

Of these players Austin is probably the only natural no9 – he's in the QPR team to put the ball in the back of the net. While Ings has not yet shown that he has the versatility of the other two who can play in the hole or out wide, in time he might prove that he can.

The point is, I think strikers now have to be more determined than ever in becoming established players.

In my career I scored a shed-load of goals at youth level, made my first-team debut then had to wait a few years to play a bit more. It has become even harder since then so it's a case of balancing your ambition, patience and humility. That might involve going on loan and taking yourself out of your comfort zone. Not every player can be a Raheem Sterling where the talent is obvious from a very young age. It's very important that football as an industry remembers this.

Follow Neil on Twitter @NeilMellor33

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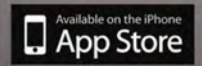
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84 Anfield's Alpine ace
Meet the slalom ski champion and LFC fan

The bit at the back for Liverpool FC's legions of fans at home and all over the world…



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THE MONTH AHEAD

FEB

Turkish delight?

Liverpool return to European action in February with both legs of their UEFA Europa League round of 32 tie against Besiktas. The first game takes place at Anfield on Thursday 19 February with the second leg seeing Liverpool return to the Ataturk Stadium, scene of the 2005 Champions League triumph, seven days later.

Slaven Bilic's Black Eagles finished third in the Turkish Super Lig last season. They qualified by topping a group which also included Tottenham Hotspur, Asteras Tripoli and Partizan Belgrade. In their two games against Spurs they drew 1-1 at White Hart Lane and won 1-0 at the Ataturk.

Bilic's squad includes former Newcastle and Chelsea striker Demba Ba and ex-Fulham and Cardiff winger Kerim Frei. "It's a difficult pairing," says Ba. "Liverpool are a team that try to strike fast and build up the game as quickly as possible. Their technical capacity is high and they are physically strong. If we can snatch a good first-leg result, it will be an advantage playing the second leg at home."



That night in the Ataturk a decade ago

"It will be tough as Liverpool will try to strike fast"

We've won it three times: a fine looking trophy



Anniversaries

4 years since Luis Suarez made his debut for Liverpool FC on 2 February – and scored against Stoke City
53 years since Gerry Byrne (above) scored his first goal for the club on 3 February
31 years since Gary Gillespie made his Liverpool FC debut on 7 February
102 years since a 2-0 Merseyside derby win at Everton on 8 February
14 years since Jari Litmanen scored his first Liverpool goal on 10 February
116 years since Alex Raisbeck scored his first Liverpool goal on 11 February
102 years since Harry Welfare made his LFC debut on 15 February
72 years since Laurie Hughes joined Liverpool FC on 19 February
24 years since that 4-4 draw with Everton in the FA Cup on 20 February
28 years since John Aldridge made his Liverpool FC debut on 21 February
37 years since Graeme Souness scored his first Liverpool FC goal on 25 February
89 years since Gordon Hodgson made his Liverpool FC debut on 27 February

BIRTHDAY REDS



Phil Neal 64 on 20 February
Alec Lindsay 67 on 27 February
Stephen Wright 35 on 8 February
Mamadou Sakho 25 on 13 February
Gabriel Paletta 29 on 15 February
Tiago Ilori 22 on 26 February
Ronnie Moran 81 on 28 February
Steve McManaman 43 on 11 February
Sammy Lee 56 on 7 February
Jonjo Shelvey 23 on 27 February
Nick Barmby 41 on 11 February
Kevin Keegan (above) **64** on 14 February
Jari Litmanen 44 on 20 February
Rickie Lambert 33 on 16 February



Derby date & Saints day

The first game of February takes Liverpool to Goodison Park for the 224th Merseyside derby. The Reds will be hoping for victory after being held to a 1-1 draw at Anfield back in September. Steven Gerrard's fine free-kick looked to have secured victory before Everton captain Phil Jagielka stunned the Kop with a spectacular strike in the closing stages.

The month also sees Liverpool play Premier League fixtures at home to Tottenham on Tuesday 10 February and away to Southampton on Sunday 22 February. Ronald Koeman's Saints have been one of the success stories of the season so far. Rickie Lambert, Adam Lallana and Dejan Lovren will return to St Mary's hoping to help the Reds overcome their former club. Liverpool are chasing a league double having edged out the Saints on the opening weekend, winning 2-1 thanks to goals from Raheem Sterling and Daniel Sturridge.

Meanwhile, Liverpool's Under-19s travel to Lisbon to take on Benfica on Tuesday 24 February in the last 16 of the UEFA Youth League. Benfica qualified by topping a group which also included Zenit, Bayer Leverkusen and AS Monaco.



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ANFIELD'S CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Significant changes as part of the regeneration plan

Work continues apace on Anfield's Main Stand expansion – set to become one of the largest all-seater single stands in Europe during 2016/17 – and the club would like to thank visitors and the local community for their patience and continued support.

Supporters will notice a number of differences during the months ahead. While the Hillsborough Memorial has been placed in safe storage (see page 9 for the temporary memorial), the Shankly Gates have also been removed on a temporary basis, to return when construction is complete.

Routine road closures remain in place on matchdays, but pedestrian access in certain areas may no longer be possible and fans will be re-routed accordingly. The clubs asks supporters to keep to the designated pedestrian access-roads and allow extra time to get to the stadium – 30 minutes prior to kick-off if possible.

New signage is positioned around the stadium to direct fans, and additional stewards and police officers are present on matchdays to help minimise disruption. The Family Park will be open as usual on Anfield Road three hours before kick-off. Due to its popularity last year we have introduced additional seating. LFC will continue to advise supporters and local residents of any changes that may affect access to Anfield Stadium.

SEASON-TICKET HOLDERS

As a Season Ticket Holder there will be times when you cannot make it to a Barclays Premier League home match due to holidays or other commitments. If so, don't let your seat go empty and lose out on the opportunity to receive credit against the cost of your Season Ticket next summer.

Use the online Ticket Exchange service to release your ticket. You can use this service as many times as you want during the season.

For more information regarding the Ticket Exchange please visit: www.liverpoolfc.com/tickets/ticket-exchange.



FIXTURE LIST 2014/2015

AUGUST

17	Southampton (H)	2-1
25	Manchester City (A)	1-3
31	Tottenham Hotspur (A)	3-0

SEPTEMBER

13	Aston Villa (H)	0-1
16	PFC Ludogorets 1945 (H, UCL)	2-1
20	West Ham United (A)	1-3
23	Middlesbrough (H, COC 3)	2-2*
27	Everton (H)	1-1

OCTOBER

1	FC Basel 1893 (A, UCL)	0-1
4	West Bromwich Albion (H)	2-1
19	Queens Park Rangers (A)	3-2
22	Real Madrid (H, UCL)	0-3
25	Hull City (H)	0-0
28	Swansea City (H, COC 4)	2-1

NOVEMBER

1	Newcastle United (A)	0-1
4	Real Madrid (A, UCL)	0-1
8	Chelsea (H)	1-2
23	Crystal Palace (A)	1-3
26	PFC Ludogorets 1945 (A, UCL)	2-2
29	Stoke City (H)	1-0

DECEMBER

2	Leicester City (A)	3-1
6	Sunderland (H, 3pm)	0-0
9	FC Basel 1893 (H, UCL)	1-1
14	Manchester United (A)	0-3
17	Bournemouth (A, COC 5)	3-1
21	Arsenal (H)	2-2
26	Burnley (A, 3pm)	
29	Swansea City (H, 8pm)	

JANUARY

1	Leicester City (H, 3pm)	2-2
5	AFC Wimbledon (A, FAC 3)	1-2
10	Sunderland (A)	0-1
17	Aston Villa (A)	2-0
20	Chelsea (H, COC SF 1)	1-1
24	Bolton W (H, FAC 4)	0-0
27	Chelsea (A, COC SF2)	0-1*
31	West Ham United (H)	

FEBRUARY

4	Bolton W (A, FAC 4R, 7.45pm)	
7	Everton (A, 5.30pm)	
10	Tottenham Hotspur (H, 8pm)	
14	FA Cup fifth round	
19	Besiktas (H, UEL, R32, 8.05pm)	
22	Southampton (A, 4.15pm)	
26	Besiktas (A, UEL, R32, 6pm)	

MARCH

1	Manchester City (H, 12pm)	
4	Burnley (H, 8pm)	
7	FA Cup quarter-finals	
12	Europa League round of 16 (1)	
16	Swansea City (A, 8pm)	
19	Europa League round of 16 (2)	
22	Manchester United (H, 1.30pm)	

APRIL

4	Arsenal (A)	
11	Newcastle United (H)	
16	Europa League quarter-finals (1)	
18	Hull City (A) / FA Cup semi-finals	
23	Europa League quarter-finals (2)	
25	West Bromwich Albion (A)	

MAY

2	Queens Park Rangers (H)	
7	Europa League semi-finals (1)	
9	Chelsea (A)	
14	Europa League semi-finals (2)	
16	Crystal Palace (H)	
24	Stoke City (A)	
27	Europa League final	
30	FA Cup final	

* LFC won on penalties

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Working with children and adults to help inspire positive change through sport – follow us on Twitter @LFCFoundation to keep up to date with the community team's projects and activities

F-A-B!

Italian ace Borini in the house for Liverpool FC's Foundation's PE session at local school

There was a very familiar face at one local Anfield school's PE lesson recently when Fabio Borini popped in to say hello and take part.

As part of a Premier League School Sports Programme delivered by Liverpool FC Foundation, the Reds forward joined 30 year-six students at Four Oaks Primary School for a warm-up and game of dodgeball. "Meeting the children and watching them enjoy their sport was fantastic," said Fabio. "It was fun to join in with their session and share my knowledge."

The Premier League School Sports Programme delivers high-quality curriculum-time coaching aimed at improving physical activity and teaching new skills. It also opens up opportunities into competitive football in the form of the Premier League Schools Tournament.

The Foundation, which has had a

Fabio and pupils having fun at Four Oaks School


Who's for a spot of dodgeball?

"Watching the kids enjoy their sport was fantastic – it was fun to join in"

relationship with the school for more than 14 years, delivers two curriculum PE sessions every Thursday, as well as an after-school football club. Foundation head Andrea Cooper says: "We deliver the Programme and Foundation mini-leagues in 60 schools across the city, bringing a wealth of sporting opportunities to hundreds of youngsters. It's something we are keen to develop to help more local children and their families to become active."

Sara Robinson, headteacher at Four Oaks, added: "We were delighted to welcome Fabio to our school. We have very good links with LFC and their Foundation – our pupils really enjoy and benefit from these sessions."

Health means wealth

Men's health sessions up and running for 2015

Are you a local man looking to change your lifestyle by boosting your health and fitness this year? Look no further than Liverpool FC Foundation's Men's Health Programme.

Open to men aged 18 and over, the free weekly community-based circuit training sessions take place at Breckfield North Everton Neighbourhood Centre on Thursdays at 3-4pm, and at Kensington Children's Centre on Wednesdays at 3.30-4.30pm. Along with circuit and gym training participants can also learn about cookery and nutrition.

Run by qualified coaches, the sessions aim to increase physicality and confidence as well as knowledge of healthy living – targeting risk factors like poor diet, obesity, heart disease, cancer, alcohol and drug awareness, and wellbeing. Andrea Cooper, head of Liverpool FC Foundation, says: "In partnership with the Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group and Liverpool Public Health we provide a range of initiatives to help reduce the poor levels of health in men locally through education, training and support."


Some of the men's health activities

Gold medal winner Kjetil



Alpine skier Kjetil Jansrud, 29, won a gold medal at last year's Winter Olympics in Sochi and went into 2015 at the top of the sport's world standings. But when the Norwegian isn't hurtling down pistes in pursuit of glory, he enjoys nothing more than keeping up to date with his beloved Liverpool FC…

How did you become a fan of Liverpool Football Club – when did it all start?

I had a friend down my street who was a supporter. It was also his father's favorite team, and we all know such things usually get inherited! However, at that time my family were not particularly football fans and as such did not pay for the channels that aired Premier League in Norway. I remember sneaking out every weekend to my friend's place to watch the Premier League. I well remember the first time I heard *You'll Never Walk Alone* being sung at Anfield. I've never looked back.

Liverpool have a lot of supporters in Norway – why do you think that is?

Generally, English football has a lot of fans in Norway. I guess that it might have something to do with the closeness of our countries geographically and also the difference in the level of our leagues. Many of us Norwegians ind the quality of English football to be a fair amount better than what we have ourselves.

"I ended up with a huge phone bill watching a game on my 3G network"

Why does Liverpool have so many fans compared to other football clubs?

My personal opinion is that the history of the club, the atmosphere of the famous stadium and the players we've had throughout the decades, appeals to people regardless of where they are from. In all my time following them, Liverpool as a club has treated players, staff and fans with respect, as well as rivals fans with respect. That is why I can always call myself a Red with pride.

Have you ever been to Anfield for a match?

Yes, I've actually been a few times. The last occasion was the home victory against Newcastle United on the final day of last season, when we came from behind to win 2-1. It's hard to find time to attend games with my busy schedule, but every time I go it's a memory for life. Applauding the players on the pitch after the game – celebrating what was an amazing performance last year, coming so close in such style. Great memories!

Words: William Hughes

THROUGH THE WIND AND RAIN... AND SNOW

Liverpool fan Kjetil Jansrud made his Alpine skiing debut 12 years ago and it's been downhill – and up the rankings – ever since


Phil Neal

Who's your favourite player, and have you met any stars?
I grew up with the teams of Robbie Fowler, Steve McManaman, Michael Owen and of course Steven Gerrard. As Gerrard has had the biggest impact on our history during my time, he is my absolute favorite. It will be sad to see him leave at the end of the season but I hope he returns. I've also had the pleasure of meeting Phil Neal – a legend and amazing character. I had a chat with him when I was over last year, and you have to love the man. It's just too bad that I didn't grow up at a time when I could witness his success in person.

How do you keep in touch with the games during your busy schedule?
If I'm not having a World Cup race at the same time, I usually see all of them on my computer. With the internet I can watch the games live – don't worry, I pay for the channels as I believe streaming illegally is ultimately not in our sport's best interest. That said, there have been a few times where I've had to run around town for a good hour to find pubs showing Premier League matches. I also ended up with a huge phonebill one time I logged in to watch a Champions League game through my 3G network! Haha – what we won't do for our team! When I'm not in the competition stage of the season I watch Liverpool matches on TV at home, often with a few friends who are also avid supporters.

You also tweet a lot about Liverpool FC...
Yes! Twitter is amazing for keeping up with the rumours and happenings in the football world. As well as connecting to people outside the skiing community, it's great to engage in a football discussion on Twitter, instead of just providing updates on how my career is developing.

Did you ever consider a career in football before skiing?
Not seriously. I did play football up until I was 14 years old. Rumours have it that my left foot was rather lethal in my youth, but to be fair everyone is happy I went for alpine skiing. My talent was more pronounced in that sport.

Having picked up two Olympic medals, how did you feel to win the Super-G (giant slalom) in Sochi?
It is impossible to describe that feeling without using up all of the pages in this magazine. I guess all the seven-year-olds competing in sport have said: I want to be an




Skiers like Kjetil can reach speeds of 90mph

ABOUT KJETIL JANSRUD

Born 22 August 1985 in Stavanger, Norway.
Made his World Cup debut in 2003, aged 17.
Went into 2015 with a career record of 20 podium finishes.
Won a silver medal in the giant slalom at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.
Went one better at last year's Winter Olympics in Sochi, winning gold in the Super-G – he also took bronze in the men's downhill, finishing 0.10 seconds behind gold medalist Matthias Mayer.
Entered 2015 top of the World Cup standings.

Olympic champion. I know I did. And then I actually managed to pull it off. It's nothing short of amazing. I am very humbled and feel very blessed have achieved such a high goal.

To be frank, alpine skiing will never rival the biggest sports in the world, like football. But then again everyone knows what the Olympics is and what an Olympic gold medal represents. It's the single biggest thing you can achieve as an athlete and a natural highpoint of one's career.

The Sochi games increased the interest in snow sports here – do you think the UK could produce a champion?

Yes! Skiing is more popular in the UK than people realise. I am sure you will produce a champion, maybe even soon as Dave Ryding is a big talent worth looking out for. And you must not forget Alain Baxter finished third at the 2002 Winter Olympics and got that bronze, the aftermath not considered [the Scot was stripped of the medal after testing positive for a banned substance but later proved it had come from a medical inhaler]. I feel sorry for him – he's one of the nicest guys in the business.

What does 2015 hold for you personally in the sport?

It's the first time in my career I have been leading the overall World Cup standings going into the new year. I will do my best to keep it going, but we'll see. There are a lot of good skiers out there and competition will be strong. I have three Olympic medals but not one World Championship medal. Instead of blaming it on anything or anyone, I'll admit that at those times I have just not been good enough. I plan to change that this year, and grabbing a World Championship medal in Vail, Colorado [2-15 February] is one of the big goals.

So your ambitions for the rest of the season...?

The same as our beloved Reds: win as much as I can. It's fairly simple: if you work harder than the others (I know I do, I know LFC does), if you act like a professional athlete 24/7 (I know I do, and I know LFC does) and if you want it enough – you will win. The question is: how much do you want it?



"Gerrard is my absolute favourite – it's sad to see him go but I hope he returns"



THE GIRL CALLED YNWA

Could Karoline Ynwa Iversen's parents really have supported any other football team?

Norway's love for Liverpool FC is well-known and one family from the Scandinavian nation has demonstrated exactly what the club means to them.

Tor-Erik Iversen and his wife Eirin Isabel, who live in Krokelvdalen, near Tromso in the country's far north, came up with an extraordinary way to pay tribute to the Reds when picking a middle name for their now four-year old daughter.

Tor-Erik explains: "The thing is I'm a huge Liverpool fan. The idea was that if we had a boy we'd give him 'Gerrard' as a middle name. But 'Gerrard' as a girl's name, in Norway in particular, doesn't really work. Then we were a bit stumped when it turned out we were having a girl.

"I'd sort of given up on the idea of a Liverpool-inspired name. But my girlfriend said: if we can't call her Gerrard, what about Ynwa, an abbreviation of *You'll Never Walk Alone*? In English it doesn't really make sense when you try and read it, but in Norwegian it's said like 'Inva'."

The couple say that although they couldn't force their daughter to be a big fan, she already is a massive Red and is very proud of her name. It's also gone down well with the majority of their acquaintances. "All our Liverpool-supporting friends absolutely love the name. But some of our friends actually support Manchester United, so I must admit they aren't too keen. A couple of them said I must be crazy."

"In English it doesn't make much sense but it sounds like 'Inva' in Norwegian"

Mum Eirin adds: "Her favourite player is Steven Gerrard. She's very sad about the fact he will be leaving in the summer. She sits and watches all the games and cheers along."

Now that Karoline Ynwa is older, her parents are planning her first trip to Merseyside in the coming months. Tor-Erik says: "I've promised for her fifth birthday we will go to Anfield to watch a game. She's never been before as she's always been too young, so she's very excited about the prospect of watching her favourite team in the flesh." Just wait till the Spion Kop starts singing her name…



BROTHERLY LOVE

Meet three lads whose passion for LFC shines through despite the long distance

Regular readers of this season's matchday programme, particular its Born & Red fan pages, may have noticed two photographs of the same three Liverpool-mad brothers 34 years apart. The first was taken in December 1980 when Zahir, Zaeem and Afzal Moosa visited Anfield for the first time from South Africa; the second a shot of them today in their beloved LFC kits.

While growing up in South Africa during the 1970s, twins Zahir and Zaeem and the younger Afzal but didn't have a favourite team until they bought a copy of *Shoot!* magazine and found a photo of the LFC squad on the centre-pages. "Kevin Keegan's hairstyle, great in its time, made us instant LFC supporters," Zahir explains. "Football coverage was nothing like how it is today. We only got to read *Shoot!* six weeks after it had come out in the UK."

Watching games on satellite TV wasn't an option either. "Instead we listened to radio commentary on the BBC World Service. Those European Cup final wins in 1977, 1978 and 1981 remain unforgettable. Thankfully the 1984 final was televised here."

By then the brothers had finally made the journey to Anfield. "In 1980 we came to see Liverpool beat Wolves 1-0 thanks to a Ray Kennedy header in the first half," Zahir continues. "We still have the match tickets and programme from that day. The souvenir shop was only a small red-brick kiosk then – you entered through one door and exited through another."



The brothers now (above) and back in 1980 (below)



Towards the end of the same decade Zaeem was in attendance for a 5-0 win against Luton Town, a hat-trick from John Aldridge grabbing the headlines. Aside from the result the highlight of the day was getting a picture with King Kenny whose daughter Kelly played the role of photographer. In 1994 it was Afzal's turn to see the team live, although he didn't have too far to travel as the Reds were playing a friendly against Kaizer Chiefs in Johannesburg. And when a Michael Owen double won the 2001 FA Cup final against Arsenal, Zahir was in Cardiff. "More recently we all attended the LFC Legends Dinner and match in Durban," he adds. "It was a truly memorable experience and gave us a great opportunity to get some of our prized memorabilia signed by LFC greats." Naturally, the brothers have influenced the rest of the family's choice of team. "There is nothing wrong with teaching the young about the right things in life – that's what Bill Shankly would have said!"



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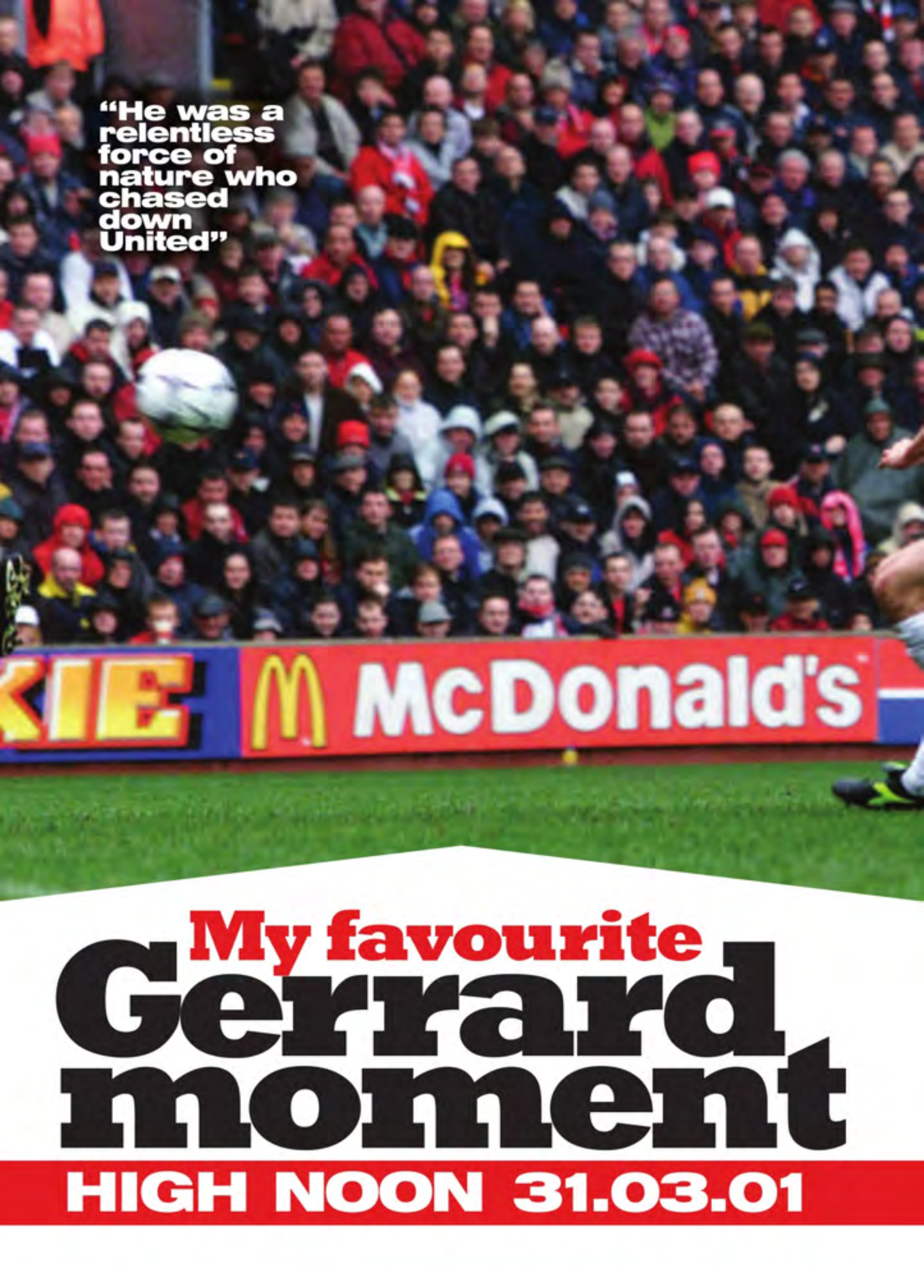
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"He was a relentless force of nature who chased down United"

My favourite Gerrard moment

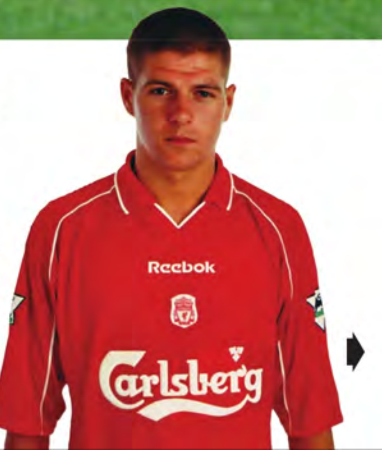
HIGH NOON 31.03.01

The magazine's editorial team pays tribute to Steven Gerrard in a new series, with editor David Cottrell rewinding 14 years…

Before this current stint I'd been lucky enough to edit Liverpool FC's matchday programme once before, during seasons 1999/2000 and 2000/01, and for the final home game of both campaigns we ran an awards edition as voted for by the fans.

The goal of the season for the treble cup-winning campaign was never in doubt: Steven Gerrard's 67mph rocket against Manchester United in a 2-0 Anfield win on 31 March 2001.

The 30-yard strike capped a sensational display from a force of nature who relentlessly, almost single-handedly, chased down a United side which had a third consecutive Premier League title all but wrapped up. Gerrard also provided the assist for Liverpool's second for Robbie Fowler, and twice in the second half, with Liverpool reduced to 10 men following Danny Murphy's dismissal, he tried to beat United goalkeeper Fabien Barthez from his own half. How many 20-year-olds would even dare once?



"This young lad has got so many qualities in his game," said Alan Parry, Sky Sports commentator during the midday kick-off. "He can tackle, he can pass the ball, he can head it. He can get from one end of the field to the other – and he can also score spectacular goals."

Gerrard's goal and performance inspired his team and energised the crowd that Saturday afternoon, in what was a season of juggernaut-like momentum – next up was a trip to Barcelona for the first leg of a UEFA Cup semi-final, followed by an FA Cup semi against Wycombe Wanderers.

As the Reds completed their first double over United for 22 years, he was subbed to a standing ovation with two minutes remaining and showed characteristic humility after the match: "Beating United was a great achievement and one we're all very proud of. We were really up for it before the game, and I think we all sensed we were going to win. I was fortunate enough to score the first goal and I have to admit it is one of the best I've ever scored. As soon as it left my foot I knew it was going in – I couldn't have hit it sweeter. I've scored a few like that this season and hopefully there are more to come."

The *Guardian* newspaper's match report called it right: 'Not for the first time, and probably not the last, Gerrard was the driving influence of this Liverpool triumph, an indomitable presence on the right of midfield. His 16th-minute haymaker, a sure-fire contender for goal of the season, was an object lesson how to strike a long shot, and watching him dominate Roy Keane et al just confirmed that Liverpool have a future England captain on their payroll. Possibly, even, this season's player of the year'.



Goal of the season in the 2000./1 programme

That senior accolade wouldn't come till 2006, but the PFA young player of the year award for 2001 was on its way. Steven Gerrard had arrived.

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SPRING INTO ACTION

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6 LFC Men's Intercept Jacket
£80.00 (A3603)



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£22.00 (A5273)



8 LFC Boy's Base Polo
£15.00 (A5070)



COME & CHECK US OUT

LFC's flagship store in the Liverpool ONE retail complex has re-opened after a state-of-the-art transformation. The store in the heart of the city now has 10,000sq ft of premier retail space over two newly-refurbished floors, offering the best shopping experience in club football. Featuring an iconic entrance and two full-sized video walls, fans can enjoy official Liverpool FC merchandise among a full audio-visual experience and references to the club's rich and glorious history. The store houses everything from exclusive LFC fashion, accessories and gifts, official kit which can be personalised at one of 20 live printing stations, and signed collectables – in a new gallery viewing area.



All featured products are available in all LFC official stores and online at liverpoolfc.com/store



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17 Jan
Great win again!!! Keep going!!! #ynwa #liverpool



12 Jan
#21



10 Jan
Good game booooooys!!! #ynwa #liverpool



21 Nov
New haircut #ynwa #liverpool



4 Nov
Matchday #el #santiago #bernabeu #realmadrid #liverpool #ynwa



24 Oct
Dinner with my friends!!! @cnyt12 @memocan42 Ready for tomorrow #liverpool #ynwa



19 Oct
Happy to be back!!! Very important 3 points!!! #liverpool #ynwa



15 Oct
Back in full training #liverpool #ynwa



15 Sept
I'm soon back!!! #ynwa #liverpool



14 Sept
Hahaha amazing day with my mates #safaripark #liverpool #ynwa



31 Aug
Well done mates!! Now off to the international games #ynwa #liverpool



5 July
@oemertoprak @myslv34 #ffm #city #skyline

David PRICE

Credit the boss for turning things around, and the skipper for everything he's done for LFC

During the past couple of months the outlook for Liverpool's season has improved dramatically and Brendan Rodgers deserves plenty of credit.

He and his staff spent plenty of time trying to find a solution to turn things around and he has hit upon a system that has helped confidence return. Brendan accepted that we were struggling defensively but has found a way to make the most of our attacking options by flooding the midfield.

Playing Emre Can in the back-three has been a masterstroke because he has a sharp footballing brain and it gives us a Daniel Agger-type player in that backline. He can carry the ball out of defence and distribute it well.

Using wing-backs has allowed some of the more creative players to get in the team and Lazar Markovic in particular is beginning to show why we signed him.

The system also enables us to have three offensive players at the top of the team which helps to make the most of our attacking threat. And although we haven't been able to score goals left-right-and-centre we have produced more free-flowing football and the link-up play has been much better – to the extent that at times it has started to remind me of last season.

When Brendan first took charge I heard some people saying he was too rigid in terms of his set-up. He is still a young manager but during his time at the club he has used plenty of systems and I think he's proved those people wrong with his flexibility this season.

February represents a good chance to climb the league table. Not long ago the prospect of hosting Tottenham in-between a derby at Goodison and a trip to Southampton would have left me feeling a bit daunted.

"February is a good chance to climb the table and make up ground"



Passing on the armband to Jordan Henderson

But now I am excited by the prospect as we really could make ground on some of our rivals and possibly leapfrog one or two of them.

We also have a number of cup games coming up and that shows that we are in the hunt for trophies and hopefully we can continue to make progress in the various competitions. Of course we would much prefer to be looking forward to Champions League knockout fixtures but the Europa League could be the key to us getting back into that competition if things don't go to plan on the league front.

Since my last column, Steven Gerrard has announced he will move to America at the end of the season. That is disappointing for all Liverpool fans to hear but Steven owes the club nothing and we owe him absolutely everything.

He deserves the opportunity to try something new but will want to sign off on a high and I'm certain he will play out of his skin between now and the end of the season and that can only be good news for the run-in.

On a personal note I am set to return to the ring against Irineu Beato Costa Jnr in Berlin on 21 February. He has a similar record to me but while it might look like a 50/50 fight on paper, I believe I have more than him and am confident that I can get back on track with a win.

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